

ELLERY QUEEN'S **MYSTERY** ANTHOLOGY FALL-WINTER 1971

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VOLUME 22

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STORIES
AND NOVELETS**

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Paul Gallico
Hugh Walpole
Julian Symons
Robert L. Fish
Gerald Kersh
O. Henry
Patricia McGerr
Robert Somerlott
Libby MacCall
Ellery Queen**

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ELLERY QUEEN'S ANTHOLOGY

FALL-
WINTER

1971

EDITED BY

"Ellery Queen"

DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., 229 PARK AVE. SOUTH
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EDITORS' NOTE

Dear Reader:

This is the 22nd in *EQMM*'s series of original paperback anthologies, now published twice a year. . .

Quite by accident we came upon a "compleat catalogue" of weapons—everything from assegai, blowgun, boomerang, claymore, dirk, and cutlass to javelin, machete, rapier, scimitar, slingshot, and tomahawk. There was a subdivision of guns, including everything from automatic, bazooka, blunderbuss, carbine, flintlock, and howitzer to machine gun, musket, pistol, pom-pom, six-shooter, and Tommy gun.

Strangely enough, this reminded us of Mark Twain's short novel titled *A Double-Barrelled Detective Story* (1902), which in turn suggested *A Triple-Barrelled Detective Story*, which, amended to *Triple-Barrelled Detective Stories*, could serve as the title of this anthology.

In the preceding 21 volumes we stressed the "triple-barrelled" sources of the stories we choose for these collections. "Three" and "triple" still trigger our editorial approach. So we again fire our first barrel—short novels and short stories about world-famous series detectives and criminals such as (and what a list this time!)

Rex Stout's Nero Wolfe
Georges Simenon's The Little Doctor
Hugh Pentecost's John Jericho
Michael Gilbert's Inspector Petrella
O. Henry's Jimmy Valentine
Robert L. Fish's Schlock Homes
Gerald Kersh's Karmesin
Ellery Queen's E.Q.

The second barrel is loaded with non-series stories of detection and crime by such celebrated masters of mystery as

Donald E. Westlake
Julian Symons
Patricia McGerr

The third barrel is grooved for stories of crime, mystery, and detection by such internationally renowned literary figures as

Hugh Walpole
O. Henry
Paul Gallico

And once again, as in the earlier 21 anthologies, we have aimed at a triple-ringed target: (1) every story must be true to the editorial sights of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, as discharged these past 31 years—top quality or top professionalism of writing, and (2) superior originality or superior craftsmanship in plotting; and (3) none of the 3 short novels, 2 novelets, and 10 short stories in this book has ever appeared in any of the 62 anthologies previously edited by

ELLERY QUEEN
(gunsmith, marksman,
and gun collector)



lex Stout

Blood Will Tell

More than halfway through this short novel, complete in this anthology, Nero Wolfe says to Archie Goodwin: "You know everything that I know; ponder it yourself... I will not be hectored into an explanation you shouldn't need"... an explanation none of us should need if we are alert enough to spot the four significant clues. Ah, the classic 'tec tradition of fairplay—long may it wave!

So, match wits with the one and only Nero Wolfe, The Fat Man, the modern Nero who riddles while crime churns (not, we'll admit, a dead-center bull's-eye, but not, you'll admit, entirely off-target). Yes, keep your private eye peeled for those four revealing clues...

Detectives: NERO WOLFE and ARCHIE GOODWIN

Naturally most of the items in the mail that is delivered to the old brownstone on West 35th Street are addressed to Nero Wolfe; but since I both work and live there, eight or ten out of a hundred are addressed to me. It is my custom to let my share wait until after I have opened Wolfe's, looked it over, and put it on his desk, but sometimes curiosity butts in. As it did that Tuesday morning when I came to an elegant cream-colored envelope, outsize, addressed to me on a

typewriter, with the return address in the corner engraved in dark brown. The name and return address read:

**JAMES NEVILLE VANCE
TWO NINETEEN HORN STREET
NEW YORK 12 NEW YORK**

Never heard of him. It wasn't flat; it bulged with something soft inside. Like everybody else, I occasionally get envelopes containing samples of something that bulges them—but not expensive enve-

lopes with engraving that isn't phony. So I slit it open and removed the contents. A folded sheet of paper that matched the envelope, including the engraved name and address, had a message typed in the center:

Archie Goodwin—Keep this until you hear from me.

JNV

"This" was a necktie—a four-in-hand, neatly folded to go in the envelope. I stretched it out—long, narrow, maybe silk, light tan, almost the same color as the stationery, with thin brown diagonal lines. A Sutcliffe label, so certainly silk, say twenty bucks. But he should have sent it to the cleaners instead of me, because it had a spot; a big one two inches long, near one end, about the same tone of brown as the thin lines; but the lines' brown was clean and live and the spot's was dirty and dead.

I sniffed at it, but I am not a beagle. Having seen a few dried bloodstains here and there, I knew the dirty color was right, but that's no phenolphthalin test. Even so, I told myself as I dropped the tie in a drawer, supposing that James Neville Vance worked in a butcher shop and forgot his bib, why pick on me? As I closed the drawer I shrugged.

That's the way to take when you get a bloodstain (maybe) necktie in the m from a stranger—just shrug; b I admit that in the next coup of hours I did something a didn't do something else. Wh I did was ring Lon Cohen at t *Gazette* to ask a question, a an hour later he called back say that James Neville Vance now in his late fifties, st owned all the real estate he ha inherited from his father, st spent winters in the Rivier and was still a bachelor; an what did he want of a priva detective? I reserved that.

What I didn't do was take walk. When nothing is stirrin and Wolfe has given me n program, I usually go out—afte the routine morning chores t work my legs and have a look a the town and my fellow mer not to mention women; b that morning I skipped i because JNV might come c phone. It had been an hones shrug, but you can't shrug a day.

I might as well have had m walk because the phone cal didn't come until a quarter pas eleven, after. Wolfe had com down to the office from hi two-hour morning session with the orchids up in the plan rooms on the roof. He had pu a spray of *Cymbidium Doris* in the vase on his desk and got hi

personal seventh of a ton
posed in his oversize custom-
made chair, and was scowling at
the dust jacket of a book, one
of the items that had been
addressed to him, when the
phone rang.

"Nero Wolfe's office, Archie
Goodwin speaking."

"Is this Archie Goodwin?"

Three people out of ten will
say that. I am always tempted to
say no, it's a trained dog, and
see what comes, next, but I
might get barked at. So I said,
"It is. In person."

"This is James Neville
Vance. Did you receive some-
thing in the mail from me?"

His voice couldn't decide
whether to be a squeak or a
ulsetto and had the worst
features of both. "Yes, pre-
sumably," I said. "Your en-
velope and letterhead."

"And an enclosure?"

"Right."

"Please destroy it. Burn it. I
intended... but what I in-
tended doesn't matter now...
I was mistaken. Burn it. I'm
sorry to have bothered you."

He hung up.

I cradled the phone and
wiveled. Wolfe had opened the
book to the title page and was
writing it with the same kind of
book a man I know has for a
pretty girl he has just met.

"If I may interrupt," I said.
Since there's nothing urgent in

the mail I have an errand,
personal or professional, I don't
know which." I got the
envelope, letterhead, and en-
closure from the drawer, rose,
and handed them to him. "If
that spot on the tie is blood,
my theory was that someone
stabbed or shot James Neville
Vance and got rid of the corpse
all right but didn't know what
to do with the tie, so he sent it
to me. But that phone call was
a bagpipe saying he was James
Neville Vance, and he had been
mistaken, and would I please
burn what he had sent me by
mail. So evidently—"

"A bagpipe?"

"I merely meant he squeak-
ed. So evidently he couldn't
burn it himself because he
didn't have a match, and now
he's impersonating James Nev-
ille Vance, who owns—or
owned—various gobs of real
estate, and it is my duty as a
citizen and a licensed private
detective to expose and de-
nounce—"

"Pfui. Some floundering
numskull."

"Okay. I'll go back to burn
it. It'll smell."

He grunted. "It may not be
blood."

I nodded. "Sure. But if it's
ketchup and tobacco juice I can
tell him how to get it out and
charge him two bucks. That will
be a bigger fee than any you've

collected for nearly a month."

Another grunt. "Where is Horn Street?"

"In the Village. Thirty-minute walk. I've had no walk."

"Very well." He opened the book.

Most of the houses on Horn Street, which is only three blocks long, could stand a coat of paint, but Number 219, a four-story brick, was all dressed up—the brick cream-colored and the trim dark brown; and the venetian blinds at the windows matched the bricks. Since Vance was in clover I supposed it was just for him, but in the vestibule there were three names in a panel on the wall. The bottom one was Fougere, the middle one was Kirk, and the top one was James Neville Vance.

I pushed the button for the top one, and after a wait a voice came from a grille: "Who is it?"

I stopped a little to put my mouth on a level with the lower grille and said, "My name is Archie Goodwin. I'd like to see Mr. Vance."

"This is Vance. What do you want?"

It was a baritone, no trace of a squeak. I told the grille, "I have something that belongs to you and I want to return it."

"You have something that belongs to me?"

"Right."

"What is it and where did you get it?"

"Correction. I *think* it belongs to you. It's a four-in-hand silk tie, Sutcliffe label, the same color as this house, with diagonal lines the same color as the trim. Cream and brown."

"Who are you and where did you get it?"

I got impatient. "Here's a suggestion," I said. "Install closed-circuit television so you can see the vestibule from up there, and phone me at the office of Nero Wolfe, where I work, and I'll come back. It will take a week or so and set you back about ten grand, but it'll be worth it to see the tie without letting me in. After you've identified it I'll tell you where I got it. If you don't—"

"Did you say Nero Wolfe? The detective?"

"Yes."

"But what . . . this is ridiculous."

"I agree. Completely. Give me a ring when you're ready."

"But I . . . all right. Use the elevator. I'm in the studio, the top floor—four."

There was a click at the door, and on the third click I pushed it open and entered. To my surprise the small hall was not more cream and brown, but a deep rich red with black panel borders, and the door of the

do-it-yourself elevator was stainless steel. When I pushed the button and the door opened, and, inside, pushed the button and was lifted, there was practically no noise or vibration—very different from the one in the old brownstone which Wolfe always used and I never did.

Stepping out when the door opened, I got another surprise. Since he had called it the studio I was expecting to smell turpentine and see a clutter of vintage Vances, but at first glance it was a piano warehouse. There were three of them in the big room, which was the length and width of the house.

The man standing there waited to speak until my glance got to him. Undersized, with too much chin for his neat smooth face, no wrinkles, he wasn't as impressive as his stationery, but his clothes were—a cream-colored silk shirt and brown made-to-fit slacks.

He cocked his head, nodded, and said, "I recognize you. I've seen you at the Flamingo." He came a step. "What's this about a tie? Let me see it."

"It's the one you sent me."

He frowned. "The one I sent you?"

"There seems to be a gap," I said. "Are you James Neville Vance?"

"I am. Certainly."

I got the envelope and letterhead from my breast pocket and held them out for inspection. "Then that's your stationery?" He was going to take them, but I held on. He examined the address on the envelope and the message on the letterhead, frowning, lifted the frown to me, and demanded, "What kind of game is this?"

"I've walked two miles to find out." I got the tie from my side pocket. "This was in the envelope. Is it yours?"

I let him take the tie, and he looked it over front and back. "What's this spot?"

"I don't know. Is it yours?"

"Yes. I mean, it must be. That pattern, the colors—they reserve it for me, or they're supposed to."

"Did you mail it to me in this envelope?"

"I did not. Why would—"

"Did you phone me this morning and tell me to burn it?"

"I did not. You got it in the mail this morning?"

I nodded. "And a phone call at a quarter past eleven from a man who squeaked and told me to burn it. Have you got a photograph of yourself handy?"

"Why . . . yes. Why?"

"You have recognized me,

but I haven't recognized you. You ask what kind of game this is, and so do I. What if you're not Vance?"

"That's ridiculous!"

"Sure, but why not humor me?"

He was going to say why not, changed his mind, and moved. Crossing the room, detouring around a piano to a bank of cabinets and shelves, he took something from a shelf, came back and handed it to me. It was a thin book with a leather binding that had stamped on it in gold: THE MUSIC OF THE FUTURE by James Neville Vance. Inside the first two pages were blank; the third had just two words at the bottom: *Privately printed*; and the fourth had a picture of the author.

A glance was enough. I put it on a nearby table. "Okay. Nice picture. Any ideas or suggestions?"

"How could I have?" He was peevish. "It's crazy!" He gave the tie another look. "It *must* be mine. I can settle that. Come along."

He headed for the rear and I followed, back beyond the second piano, and then down a spiral stairs, wide for a spiral, with carpeted steps and a polished wooden rail. At the bottom, the rear end of a good-sized living room, he

turned right through an open door and we were in a bedroom.

He crossed to another door and opened it, and I stopped two steps off. It was a walk-in closet. A friend of mine once told me that a woman's clothes closet will tell you more about her than any other room in the house, and if that goes for a man too there was my chance to get the lowdown on James Neville Vance, but I was interested only in his neckties. They were on a rack at the right, three rows of them, quite an assortment, some cream and brown but by no means all.

James Neville Vance fingered through part of one row, repeated it, turned and emerged, and said, "It's mine. I had nine and gave one to somebody, and there are only seven." He shook his head. "I can't imagine..." He let it hang. "What on earth..." He let that hang too.

"And your stationery," I said.

"Yes. Of course."

"And the phone call telling me to burn it. With a squeak."

"You asked if I had any ideas or suggestions. Have you?"

"I could have, but they would be expensive. I work for Nero Wolfe and it would be on his time, and the bill would be

bad news. You must know who has access to your stationery and that closet, and you ought to be able to make some kind of guess about who and why. And you won't need the tie. It came to me in the mail, so actually and legally it's in my possession, and I ought to keep it." I put a hand out. "If you don't mind?"

"Of course." He handed it over. "But I might... you're not going to burn it?"

"No, indeed." I stuck it in my side pocket. The envelope and letterhead were back in my breast pocket. "I have a little collection of souvenirs. If and when you have occasion to produce it for—"

A bell tinkled somewhere, a soft musical tinkle, possibly the music of the future. He frowned and turned and started for the front, and I followed, back through the open door, and across the living room to another door, which he opened. Two men were in a little foyer—one a square little guy in shirt sleeves and brown-denim pants, and the other, also square but big, a harness bull.

"Yes, Bert?" Vance said.

"This cop," the little guy said. "He wants in to Mrs. Kirk's apartment."

"What for?"

The bull spoke. "Just to look, Mr. Vance. I'm on patrol

and I got a call. Probably nothing; it usually isn't, but I've got to look. Sorry to bother you."

"Look at what?"

"I don't know. Probably nothing, as I say. Just to see that all's in order. Law and order."

"Why shouldn't it be in order? This is my house, officer."

"Yeah, I know it is. And this is my job. I get a call, I do as I'm told. When I pushed the Kirk button there was no answer, so I got the janitor. Routine. I said I'm sorry to bother you."

"Very well. You have the key, Bert?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ring before you—I'd better go with you." He crossed the sill and, when I was out, closed the door. Four of us in the elevator didn't leave much room. When it stopped at 2 and they stepped out, I stepped out too, into another small foyer.

Vance pressed a button on a door jamb, waited nearly half a minute, pressed it again, kept his finger on it for five seconds, and waited some more.

"All right, Bert," he said, and moved aside. Bert put a key in the lock—a Rabson, I noticed—turned it, turned the knob, pushed the door open, and made room for Vance to

enter. Then the cop, and then me.

Two steps in, Vance stopped, faced the rear, and raised his baritone: "Bonny! It's Jim!"

I saw it first—a blue slipper on its side on the floor with a foot in it, extending beyond the edge of a couch.

I moved automatically, but stopped short. Let the cop do his own discovering. He did; he saw it too, and went; and when he had passed the end of the couch he stopped shorter than I had, growled, "Godalmighty," and stood looking down.

Then I moved, and so did Vance. When Vance saw it, all of it, he went stiff, gawking; then he made a sort of choking noise, and crumpled. It wasn't a faint; his knees just quit on him and he went down, and no wonder. Even live blood on a live face makes an impression, but when the face is dead and the blood has dried all over one side and the ear, plenty of it, you do need knees.

I don't say I wasn't impressed, but my problem wasn't knees. It took me maybe six seconds to decide. Bert had joined us and was reacting. Vance had grabbed the back of the couch to pull himself up. The cop was squatting for a close-up of the dead face. No one knew if I was there or not,

and in another six seconds wasn't.

I went to the door, easy, let myself out, took the elevator down, and went on out to the sidewalk. A police car was double-parked right in front and the cop at the wheel, seeing me emerge from that house, gave me an eye but let it go at that as I headed west.

Approaching Sixth Avenue, I felt sweat trickling down onto my cheek and got out my handkerchief. The sun was at the top on a warm August day, but I don't sweat when I'm walking, and besides, why didn't I know it before it collected enough to trickle? There you are. One man's knees buckle immediately and another man starts sweating five minutes later and doesn't know it.

It was a quarter to one when I climbed out of a taxi in front of the old brownstone on West 35th Street, mounted the seven steps of the stoop, and used my key. Before proceeding down the hall to the office I used my handkerchief thoroughly; Wolfe, who misses nothing, had never seen me sweat and wouldn't now.

When I entered he was still at his desk with the new book, and he took his eyes from it barely enough for a sidewise glance at me as I crossed to my

lesk. I sat and said, "I don't like to interrupt, but I have a report."

He grunted. "Is it necessary?"

"It's desirable. There's nearly half an hour till lunch, and if someone comes—for instance, an officer of the law—it would be better if you knew about it."

He let the book down a little. "What the devil are you into now?"

"That's the report. Ten minutes will do it, fifteen at the outside, even verbatim."

He inserted a bookmark and put the book on the desk. "Well?"

I started in, verbatim, and by the time I was telling Vance he should install closed-circuit television, Wolfe was leaning back with his eyes closed. Merely force of habit. When I mentioned the title of the privately printed book he made a noise—he says all music is a vestige of barbarism—and when I came to the end he snorted and opened his eyes.

"I don't believe it," he said flatly. "You've omitted something. A death by violence, and, not involved and with no commitment, you left? Nonsense." He straightened up.

I nodded. "You're not interested and you don't intend to be, so you didn't bother to look at it. I was present at the

discovery of a dead body, obviously murdered. If I had hung around I would have been stuck. In another minute the cop would have ordered us to stay put, and he would have taken my name and recognized it. When Homicide came—probably Stebbins, but no matter who—he would have learned why I was there, if not from me then from Vance, and he would have taken the envelope and letterhead and necktie, and I wanted them for souvenirs. As I told Vance, they are actually and legally in my possession."

"Pfui."

"I disagree. Of course I would have liked to stay long enough to get a sample of that blood to have it compared with the spot on the tie. If it was the same I would be the first to know it and it's nice to be first. Also, of course, Vance will tell them about me, and the question is—can I be hooked for obstructing justice if I refuse to hand over the tie? I don't see how. There's nothing to connect it with that homicide until and unless her blood is compared with and matches the spot."

Wolfe grunted. "Flummery. Provoking the police is permissible only when it serves a purpose."

"Certainly. And if James Neville Vance comes or calls to

say that he expects to be charged with the murder of Mrs. Kirk, if that's who she was, partly because of the tie he *didn't* send me, and if he wants to hire you, wouldn't it be convenient to have the tie? And the envelope and letterhead?"

"I have no expectation of being engaged by Mr. Vance. Nor desire."

"Sure. Because you would have to work. I remarked yesterday that the gross take for the first six months of 1962 is nine grand behind 1961. I am performing one of the main functions you pay me for."

"Not brilliantly," he said, and picked up the book. Merely a childish gesture, since Fritz would enter in eight minutes to announce lunch. I went and opened the safe and stashed my souvenirs on a shelf in the inner compartment.

Inspector Cramer of Homicide West came at ten minutes past six.

I had been functioning all afternoon, I don't say brilliantly. During lunch, in the dining room across the hall, while listening to Wolfe's table talk with one ear, I decided to make myself scarce while I considered the matter. There was no sense in getting out on a limb just for the hell of it, and a homicide dick might show any minute; so

as we left the table I told Wolfe that since we had no expectations or desires I was going out on some personal chores.

Wolfe gave me a sharp glance, made a face, and headed for the office. As I was turning to the front, the phone rang and I went in and got it. It was the D.A.'s office inviting me to call I would make up my mind on the way downtown.

It was Lon Cohen. He had compliments. "No question about it, Archie," he said "you'd be worth your weight in rubies to any newspaper in town, especially the *Gazette*. A nine thirty you phone for drop on James Neville Vance. A twelve twenty, less than three hours later, a cop finds a body in his house and both you and he are present. Marvelous. Any legman can find out what happened, but knowing what *going* to happen—you're one in eight million. What's on the program for tomorrow? I only want one day at a time."

I was a little short with him because my problem was the program for today.

I was out of the house and halfway to Eighth Avenue, with no destination in mind, when I realized I was ignoring the main point—no, two main points. One, if a dick came before Wolfe went up to the plant rooms at four o'clock, Wolfe

might possibly give him the souvenirs, to keep me out of trouble. Two, if the spot on the tie wasn't blood and its being sent to me was just some kind of gag, and it therefore had no connection with a murder, I was stewing about nothing.

So I turned and went back. Wolfe, at his desk with his book, apparently paid no attention as I opened the safe and took out the souvenirs; but of course he saw. I pocketed them and left.

Twenty minutes later I was seated in a room on the tenth floor of a building on 43rd Street, telling a man at a desk, "This is for me personally, Mr. Hirsh, not for Mr. Wolfe, but it's possible that he may have a use for it before long." I put the tie on the desk and pointed to the spot. "How long will it take to tell what that is?"

He bent his head for a look without touching it. "Maybe ten minutes, maybe a week, conceivably never."

"How long will it take to tell if it's blood?"

He got a glass from a drawer and took another look. "It's a fairly fresh stain. That it isn't blood, negative for hemoglobin, ten minutes. That it is blood, thirty or forty minutes. That it is or isn't human blood, up to ninety minutes, maybe less. To type it with certainty if it's

human, at least five hours."

"I only need yes or no on the human. Would you have to ruin the whole spot?"

"Oh, no. Just a few threads."

"Okay, I'll wait. As I say, it's not for Mr. Wolfe, but I'll appreciate it very much. I'll be in the anteroom."

He rose, taking the tie. "I'll have to do it myself. It's vacation time and we're short-handed."

An hour and a half later, at twenty minutes to five, I was in a down elevator, the tie back in my pocket minus only a few threads. It was human blood, and the stain was less than a week old, probably much less. So I wasn't in a stew for nothing—but now what?

Of course I could go back to the office and try for fingerprints on the envelope and letterhead, but that would have been just passing time since I had nothing to compare them with. Or I could phone James Neville Vance, tell him what the spot was, and ask if he now had any ideas or suggestions; but that would have been pushing it, since I didn't know whether he had told the cops why I was there.

Considering, as I emerged to the sidewalk, how little I did know, that it was either go home and sit on it or learn

something somehow, and that the *Gazette* building was only a five-minute walk, I turned east at 44th Street. Lon Cohen's room is on the twentieth floor, two doors down the hall from the corner office of the publisher.

When I walked in, having been announced, he was at one of the three phones on his desk, and I sat. When he hung up he swiveled and said, "No welcome. If you were a real pal you'd have told me this morning and we could have had a photographer there."

"Next time." I crossed my legs to show that we had all day. "You will now please tell me whose body I helped discover and go on from there. I've got amnesia."

"The twilight edition will be on the stands in half an hour and costs a dime."

"Sure, but I want it all, not only what's fit to print."

Before I left, nearly an hour later, he had two journalists up from downstairs. The crop that can be brought in on a hot one, including pictures, in less than five hours, makes you proud to be an American. For instance, there was a photo of Mrs. Martin Kirk, née Bonny Sommers, in a bikini on a beach in 1958.

I'll stick to the essentials. Bonny Sommers had been a

secretary in a prominent firm of architects, and a year ago, at the age of 25, she had married one of its not-yet-prominent young men, Martin Kirk, age 33. There were contradictions as to how soon it had started to sour, but none on the fact that Kirk had moved out to a hotel room two weeks ago. If he had developed a conflicting interest its object hadn't been spotted, but efforts to find and identify it were in process. As for Bonny, it was established that she was inclined to experiments, but the details needed further inquiry and were getting it. Four names were mentioned in that connection. One of them was James Neville Vance, and another was Paul Fougere, the tenant, with his wife, of the ground floor of Vance's house. Fougere was an electronics technician and vice-president of Audivideo, Inc.

As for today, Kirk had phoned police headquarters a little before noon, saying that he had dialed his wife's number six times in eighteen hours and got no answer; that he had gone to the house about eleven o'clock, got no response to his ring from the vestibule, used his key to get in, pushed the button at the apartment door repeatedly and heard the bell, without result, and departed without entering; and that he

wanted the police to take a look. He had been asked to be there to let a cop use his key but had declined.

Bonny Kirk had last been seen alive, to present knowledge, by a man from a package store who had delivered a bottle of vodka and three bottles of tonic to her at the apartment door, and been paid by her, a little before one o'clock on Monday afternoon. The unopened vodka bottle, found under the couch with blood on it, had been used to smash Bonny Kirk's skull sometime between one P.M. and eight P.M. Monday, the latter limit having been supplied by the medical examiner.

Among those who had been summoned or escorted to the D.A.'s office were Martin Kirk, James Neville Vance, Mr. and Mrs. Paul Fougere, and Bert Odom, the janitor. Presumably some of them, perhaps all, were still there.

For all that and a lot more I'm leaving out I didn't owe Lon anything, since on our give-and-take record to date I had a credit balance; so I didn't mention the necktie. Of course he wanted to know who Wolfe's client was and what about Vance, and it never hurts to have Wolfe's name in the paper, not to mention mine, but since the whole point was that Wolfe

was short on clients I decided to save it. Naturally he didn't believe it, that Wolfe had no client, and when I got up to go he said, "No welcome and no fare-you, well either."

I took a taxi because Wolfe likes to find me in the office when he comes down from the plant rooms at six o'clock, and he pays me and I had spent the day on personal chores; but with the traffic at that hour I might as well have walked, and it was ten past six when the hackie finally made it. As I was climbing out, a car I recognized pulled up just behind, and as I stood waiting, a man I also recognized got out of it—a big solid specimen with a big red face topped by an old felt hat even on a hot August day. I greeted him, "I'll be damned. You yourself?"

Ignoring me, he called to my hackie, "Where did you get this fare?" Apparently the hackie recognized Inspector Cramer of Homicide West, for he called back, "Forty-second and Lexington, Inspector."

"All right, move on." Then to me: "We'll go in."

I shook my head. "I'll save you the trouble. Mr. Wolfe has a new book and there's no point in annoying him. The tie was mailed to me, not to him, and he knows nothing about it and doesn't want to."

"I'd rather get that from him. Come on."

"Nothing doing. He's sore enough as it is, and so am I. I've wasted a day. I've learned that the spot on the tie is human blood, but what—"

"How did you learn that?"

"I had it tested at a laboratory."

"You did." His face got redder. "You left the scene of a crime, withholding information. Then you tampered with evidence. If you think—"

"Nuts. Evidence of what? Even with blood, it's not evidence if it isn't the same type as the victim's. As for leaving the scene, I wasn't concerned and no one told me to stay. As for tampering, it's still a perfectly good spot—just a few threads are gone. I had to know if it was blood because if it wasn't I was going to keep it, and if a court ordered me to fork it over I would have fought it. I wanted to find out who had sent it to me and why, and I still do. But since it's blood I couldn't fight an order." I got the souvenirs from my pockets. "Here. When you're through with them I want them back."

"You do." He took them and looked them over. "There's a typewriter in Vance's place. Did you take a sample for comparison?"

"You know damn well I

didn't, since he has told you what I said and did."

"He could forget. Is this the tie you got in the mail this morning and is this the envelope it came in?"

"Yes. Now that's an idea. I could have got another set from Vance. I wish I'd thought of it."

"You could have. I know you. I'm taking you down, but we'll go in first. I want to ask Wolfe one question."

"I'm not going in, and one will get you ten you won't get in. He's not interested and doesn't intend to be. I could come down after dinner. We're having lobsters, simmered in white wine with tarragon, and a white wine sauce with the tomalley and coral—"

"I'm taking you." He aimed a thumb at the car. "Get in."

I got home well after midnight and before going up two flights to bed, I hit the refrigerator for left-over lobster and a glass of milk—to remove both hunger and the taste for the excuse for bread and stringy corned beef I had been supplied with at the D.A.'s office.

Since my connection with their homicide had been short and simple—merely the twenty seconds I had spent in the Kirk apartment—and my connection with Vance hadn't been much

longer, an hour of me should have been more than enough, including typing the statement for me to sign. So it wasn't until after nine o'clock that I realized, from a question by an assistant D.A. named Mandel, what the idea was. They actually thought the tie thing might be some kind of dodge I had been in on, and they were keeping me until they got a report on the stain.

So I cooled down and took it easy, got on speaking terms with a dick who was put in a room with me to see that I didn't jump out a window, got him to produce a deck for some friendly gin rummy, and in two hours managed to lose \$4.70. I called time at that point and paid him because he was getting sleepy and it would have been next to impossible to keep him ahead.

But I got my money's worth. Around midnight someone came and called him out, and when he returned ten minutes later and said I was no longer needed I gave him a friendly grin—a good loser, no hard feelings—and said, “So the blood's the same type, huh?” And he nodded and said, “Yeah, modern science is wonderful.”

So, I told myself as I got the lobster out, I got not only my money's worth but my time's

worth, and by the time I was upstairs and in my pajamas I had decided that if Wolfe wasn't interested I certainly was, and I was going to find out who had sent me that tie even if I had to take a month's leave of absence.

Except in emergencies I get a full eight hours' sleep, and that was merely a project, not an emergency, so I didn't get down for breakfast, which I eat in the kitchen, until after ten o'clock. As I got orange juice from the refrigerator and Fritz started the burner under the cake griddle, he asked where I had dined, and I said he knew darned well I hadn't dined at all since I had phoned that I was in the D.A.'s office, and he nodded and said, “These clients in trouble.”

“Look, Fritz,” I told him, “you're a chef, not a diplomat, so why do you keep that up? You know we've had no client for a month and you want to know if we've hooked one, so why don't you just ask? Repeat after me, ‘Have we got a client?’ Try it.”

“Archie.” He turned a palm up. “You would have to say yes or no. The way I do it, you can blaiser if you wish.”

I had to ask him how to spell it so I could look it up when I went to the office. Sitting, I picked up *The Times*, and my

brow went up when I saw that it had made the front page. Probably on account of Martin Kirk—*The Times* loves architects as much as it hates disc jockeys and private detectives. It had nothing useful to add to what I had got from Lon, but it mentioned that Mrs. Kirk had been born in Manhattan, Kansas. Any other paper which had dug up that detail would have had a feature piece about born in Manhattan and died in Manhattan.

After three griddle cakes with home-made sausage and one with thyme honey, and two cups of coffee, I made it to the office in time to have the desks dusted, *blaiser* looked up, and the mail opened, when Wolfe came down from the plant rooms. I waited until he had sat down and glanced through the mail to tell him that it now looked as if someone had sent me a hot piece of evidence in a homicide, and I intended to find out why—on my own time, of course—and anyway he wouldn't be needing me since apparently there was nobody that needed him.

His lips tightened. "Evidence? Merely a conjecture."

"No, sir. I took it to Ludlow and it's human blood. So I gave it to Cramer. Of course you've read *The Times*?"

"Yes."

"The blood is the same type as Mrs. Kirk's. If it was or is a floundering numskull, obviously I'd better see—"

The doorbell rang.

I got up and went, telling myself it was even money it was James Neville Vance, but it wasn't. A glance at the one-way glass panel in the front door settled that. It was a panhandler who had run out of luck and started ringing doorbells—a tall lanky one pretending he had to lean against the jamb to keep himself upright. Opening the door, I said politely, "It's a hard life. Good morning."

He got me in focus with bleary eyes and said, "I would like to see Nero Wolfe. My name is Martin Kirk."

If you think I should have recognized him from the pictures Lon had shown me, I don't agree. You should have seen him. I told him Mr. Wolfe saw people only by appointment, but I'd ask. "You're the Martin Kirk who lives at Two-nineteen Horn Street?"

He said he was, and I invited him in, ushered him into the front room and to a seat, which he evidently needed, went to the office by way of the connecting door, closed the door, and crossed to Wolfe's desk. "I'm on my own time now," I told him. "It's Martin Kirk. He asked to see you, but

of course you're not interested. May I use the front room?"

He took a deep breath, in through his nose and out through his mouth, then glared at me for five seconds and growled, "Bring him in."

"But you don't—"

"Bring him."

Unheard of. Absolutely contrary to nature—his nature. The Nero Wolfe I thought I knew would at least have wanted me to pump him first. But with a genius you never know.

As I returned to the front room and told Kirk to come with me, I decided that the idea must be to show me that I would be a sap to waste my time. Wolfe would make short work of Martin Kirk. So as Kirk flopped into the red leather chair near the end of Wolfe's desk, Wolfe snapped at him, "Well, sir? I have read the morning paper. Why do you come to me?"

Kirk pressed the heels of his palms against his eyes. He groaned. He lowered his hands and the bleary eyes blinked. "You'll have to make allowances," he said. "I just left the District Attorney's office. I was there all night and had no sleep."

"Have you eaten?"

"My God no."

Wolfe made a face. That complicated it. The mere

thought of a man going without food was disagreeable, and to have one here in his house was intolerable. He had to either get him out in a hurry or feed him. "Why should I make allowances?" he demanded.

Kirk actually tried to smile, and it made me want to feed him myself. "I know about you," he said. "You're hard. And you charge high fees. I can pay you, don't worry about that. They think I killed my wife. They let me go, but they—"

"Did you kill your wife?"

"No. But they think I did, and they think they can prove it. I haven't got a lawyer, and I don't know any lawyer I want to go to. I came to you because I know about you—partly that, and partly because they asked me a lot of questions about you—about you and Archie Goodwin." He looked at me. "You're Archie Goodwin, aren't you?"

I told him yes, and he went back to Wolfe. "They asked if I knew you or Goodwin, if I had ever met either of you, and they seemed to think I had—no, they *did* think I had. It seemed to have some connection with something that was mailed to Goodwin, and something about a necktie, and something about a phone call he got yesterday. I'm sorry to be so vague, but I

said you'd have to make allowances, I'm not myself. I haven't been myself since—I found—" His jaw had started to work and he stopped to control it. "My wife," he said. "They kept at me that she wasn't much of a wife, and all right, she wasn't, but if a woman—I mean if a man—"

He stopped again to handle his jaw. In a moment he went on, "So I came to you partly because I thought you might know about a tie and a phone call and something mailed to Goodwin. Do you?"

"Possibly." Wolfe was regarding him. "Mr. Kirk. You said you can pay me, but I don't sell information. I sell only services."

"That's what I want, your services."

"You want to hire me to investigate this affair?"

"Yes. That's why I'm here."

"And you can pay me without undue strain?"

"Yes. I have—yes. Do you want a check now?"

"A thousand dollars will do as a retainer."

I had to shut my eyes a second to keep from gawking. That wasn't only unheard of, it was unbelievable. Taking on a job, which meant that he would have to work, without the usual dodging and stalling—that *could* be on account of the lag in

receipts, but taking a murder suspect for a client offhand, no questions asked but the routine did you kill her and can you pay me, without the faintest notion whether he was guilty or not and how much the cops had on him—that simply wasn't done, not by anybody, let alone Nero Wolfe.

I had to clamp my teeth on my lip to sit and take it. As Kirk got out a check book and a pen Wolfe pushed a button on his desk, and in a moment Fritz came.

"A tray please," Wolfe said to him. "The madrilène is ready?"

"Yes, sir."

"And the pudding?"

"Yes, sir."

"A bowl of each, cheese with water cress, and hot tea."

When Fritz turned and went I would have liked to go along—to tell him that there could be something worse than having no client.

An hour later, when the doorbell rang again, Kirk was still there and still the client, and I would still have had to toss a coin to decide where I stood on the question, did he or didn't he?

Wolfe had of course refused either to talk or listen until the tray had come and gone. Kirk had said he couldn't eat, but

when Wolfe insisted, he tried, and if a man can swallow anything, he can swallow Fritz's madrilène with beet juice, and after one spoonful of his lemon sherry pudding with brown sugar sauce there's no argument. The cheese and water cress were still on the tray when I took it to the kitchen, but the bowls were empty.

When I returned, Wolfe had started in. "...so I'll reverse the process," he was saying. "I'll tell you and then ask you. Are you sufficiently yourself to comprehend?"

"I'm better. I didn't think I could eat. I'm glad you made me." He didn't look any better.

Wolfe nodded. "The brain can be hoodwinked but not the stomach. First, then, your statement that you didn't kill your wife is of course of no weight. I have assumed that you didn't for reasons of my own, which I reserve. Do you know or suspect who did kill her?"

"No. There are ... no."

"Then attend. An item in yesterday's mail to this house was an envelope, typewritten, addressed to Mr. Goodwin. A paper inside had a typewritten note saying, 'Archie Goodwin, Keep this until you hear from me, JNV.' The envelope and paper were the engraved stationery of James Neville Vance. Also in the envelope was a

four-in-hand necktie, cream-colored with brown diagonal stripes, and it had a spot on it, a large brown stain."

Kirk was squinting, concentrating. "So that's how it was. They never told me exactly..."

"They wouldn't. Neither would I if I weren't engaged in your interest. At a quarter past eleven yesterday morning Mr. Goodwin got a phone call, and a voice that squeaked, presumably for disguise, said it was James Neville Vance and asked him to burn what he had received in the mail. Mr. Goodwin, provoked, went to Two-nineteen Horn Street and was admitted by Vance, who identified the tie as one of his but denied that he had sent it. As Mr. Goodwin was about to go, a policeman arrived who wanted access to your apartment, and Mr. Goodwin was with Mr. Vance and the policeman when your wife's body was discovered, but he left immediately. Later he took—"

"But what—"

"Don't interrupt. He took the tie to a laboratory and learned that the spot was human blood. He gave the tie, and the envelope and letterhead, to a law officer who had been told of the tie episode by Mr. Vance, and the police have

established that the blood is the same type as your wife's. You say they think they can prove that you killed your wife. Did they take your fingerprints?"

"Yes. They . . . I let them."

"Could your fingerprints be on that envelope and letter-head?"

"Of course not. How could they? I don't understand—"

"If you please. Mr. Vance told Mr. Goodwin that he had nine ties of that pattern and gave one to somebody. Did he give it to you? Cream-colored with brown stripes."

Kirk's mouth opened—and stayed open. The question was answered.

"When did he give it to you?"

"About two months ago."

"Where is it now?"

"I suppose . . . I don't know."

"When you moved to a hotel room two weeks ago you took personal effects. Including that tie?"

"I don't know. I didn't notice. I took most of my clothes, but I wasn't noticing things like ties. I'll see if it's there."

"It isn't." Wolfe took a deep breath, leaned back, and closed his eyes. Kirk looked at me, blinking, and was going to say something, but I shook my head. He had said enough

already to make me think it might have been better all around if I had burned the damned souvenirs. Kirk put his palms to his temples and massaged.

Wolfe opened his eyes and straightened up. He regarded Kirk, not cordially. "It's a mess," he stated. "I have questions of course, but you'll answer them more to the point if I first expound this necktie tangle. Are your wits up to it? Or should you sleep first?"

"No. If I don't . . . I'm all right."

"Pfui. You can't even focus your eyes properly. I'll merely describe it and ignore the intricacies. Assuming that the blood on the tie is; in fact, your wife's blood, there are three obvious theories. The police theory must be that when you killed your wife the blood got on the tie, either inadvertently or by your deliberate act, and to implicate Vance you used his stationery to mail it to Mr. Goodwin. It was probably premeditated, since you had the stationery at hand. I don't ask if that was possible; the police must know it was. You had been in his apartment, hadn't you?"

"Yes."

"Frequently?"

"Yes. Both my wife and I . . . yes."

"Is there a typewriter in his apartment?"

"There's one in his studio."

"You could have used it. Is there one in your apartment?"

"Yes."

"More subtly, you could have used that, thinking it would be assumed—but that's one of the intricacies I'll ignore for the moment. So much for the police theory. Rejecting it because you didn't kill your wife, I need an alternative, and there are two. One: Vance killed her. It would take an hour or more to talk that out, with all its twists respecting the tie. He had it on and blood got on it, and he used it to call attention to himself in so preposterous a manner that the attention would inevitably be shifted to you; but in that case he had previously retrieved the tie he had given you, so it had been premeditated for at least two weeks. If the tie he gave you is in your hotel room that will be another twist. Still another: he thought it possible that Mr. Goodwin would burn it as requested on the phone, and if so he would admit he had sent it, since it would no longer be available for inspection, saying he had found it somewhere on his premises and intended to get Mr. Goodwin to investigate, but changed his mind."

"But why? I don't see..."

"Neither do I. I said it's a mess. The other alternative: X killed your wife and undertook to involve both Vance and you. Before considering Mr. X, what about Vance? If he killed her, why? Did he have a why?"

Kirk shook his head. "If he did... no. Not Vance."

"She wasn't much of a wife. Your phrase. Granting that no woman is much of a wife, did she have distinctive flaws?"

He shut his eyes for a long moment, opened them, and said, "She's dead."

"And you're here because the police think you killed her, and they are digging up every fact about her that's accessible. Decorum is pointless. At your trial, if it comes to that, her defects will become public property. What were they?"

"They were already public property—our little public." He swallowed. "I knew when I married her that she was promis—no, she wasn't promiscuous, she was too sensitive for that. She was incredibly beautiful. You know that?"

"No."

"She was. I thought then that she was simply curious about men and—well, impetuous—and a little reckless. I didn't know until after we had been married a few months that she had no moral sense about

sexual relations—not just no moral sense, no *sense*. She was sensitive, very sensitive, but that's different. But I was stuck. I don't mean I was stuck just because I was married to her—that's simple enough to remedy nowadays. I mean I was really *stuck*. Do you know what it's like to have all your feelings and desires, all the desires that really matter, centered on one woman?"

"No."

"I do." He shook his head, jerked it from side to side several times. "What got me started?"

He could have meant either what got him started on that woman or what got him started on talking about her. Wolfe, assuming the latter, said, "I asked you about Mr. Vance. Was he one of the objects of her curiosity?"

"Good lord, no."

"You can't be sure of that."

"Oh, yes, I can. She never bothered to pretend—I tell you she had no *sense*. I did some work for Vance on a couple of buildings, and I had that apartment before I was married. For her he was a nice old guy, rather a bore, who let her use one of his pianos when she felt like it. I am sure."

Wolfe grunted. "Then Mr. X. He must meet certain specifications. It would be fatuous not

to assume—tentatively, at least—that whoever killed your wife sent the necktie to Mr. Goodwin, either to involve Mr. Vance or with some design more artful. So he had access to Vance's stationery and either to his tie rack or to yours; and he had had enough association with your wife to want her dead. That narrows it, and you should be able to suggest candidates."

Kirk was squinting again, concentrating. "I don't think I can," he said. "I could name men who have been . . . associated with my wife, but none of them has ever met Vance as far as I know. Or I could name men I have seen at Vance's place, but none of them has—"

He stopped abruptly. Wolfe eyed him. "His name?"

"No. He didn't want her dead."

"His name?"

"I'm not going to accuse him."

"Preserve your scruples by all means. I won't accuse him either without sufficient cause."

"Paul Fougere."

Wolfe nodded. "The tenant on the ground floor. As I said, I have read the morning paper. He was an object of your wife's curiosity?"

"Yes."

"Had the curiosity been satisfied?"

"If you mean was she through with him, I don't know. I don't think so. But I'm not sure."

"Had he had opportunities to get some of Vance's stationery?"

"Yes. Plenty of them."

"We'll return to him later."

Wolfe glanced up at the clock and shifted his bulk in the chair. "Now you. Not to try you, but to learn the extent of your peril. I want the answers you have given the police. I don't ask where you were Monday afternoon because if you were exluded by an alibi you wouldn't be here. Why did you move to a hotel room two weeks ago? What you have told the police."

"I told them the truth. I had to decide what to do. Seeing my wife and hearing her, having her touch me—it had become impossible."

"Did you decide what to do?"

"Yes. I decided to try to persuade her to have a baby. I thought that might make her... might change her. I realized I couldn't be sure the baby was mine, but there was no way out of that. That's what I told the police, but it wasn't true. The baby idea was only one of many I thought of, and I knew it was no good—I knew I couldn't take it, not knowing if

I was its father. I didn't actually decide anything."

"But you dialed her phone number six times between four o'clock Monday afternoon and ten o'clock Tuesday morning. What for?"

"What I told the police? To say I wanted to see her, to persuade her to have a baby."

"Actually what for?"

"To hear her voice." Kirk made fists and pressed them on his knees. "Mr. Wolfe, you don't know. I was *stuck*. You could pity me or you could sneer at me, but I wouldn't give a damn, it wouldn't mean a thing. Say I was obsessed, and what does that mean? I still had my faculties, I could do my work pretty well, and I could even think straight about her, as far as *thinking* went. One of the ideas I had, I realized that the one thing I could do that would settle it was to kill her. I knew I couldn't do it, but I realized that that was the one sure thing, and I wished I could do it."

He opened his fists and closed them again. "I hadn't seen her or heard her voice for two weeks, and I dialed the number, and when there was still no answer to my ring from the vestibule and I went in and took the elevator I intended to use my key upstairs too, but I didn't. I simply couldn't. She

might be there—and not be alone. I left and went to a bar and bought a drink, but I didn't drink it. I wanted to know if her things were there, and I thought of phoning Jimmy Vance, but finally decided to phone police headquarters instead. Even if they found her there and someone was with her, that might—"

The doorbell rang, and I went, again giving myself even money that it was Vance, and losing again. It was a girl, or woman, and she had a kind of eyes that I had met only twice before—once in a woman and once in a man.

I have a habit, when it's a stranger on the stoop, of taking a five-second look through the one-way glass and tagging him or her—to see how close I can come. From inside, the view through the glass is practically clear, but from the outside, the glass might as well be wood. Face to face with me, her eyes, slanted up, had exactly the look they would have if she were seeing me. They were nice enough hazel eyes, but I hadn't liked it the other two times it had happened, and I didn't like it then. So not trying to tag her, I opened the door.

"I beg your pardon," she said. "I believe Mr. Kirk is here? Martin Kirk?"

It wasn't possible. They

wouldn't put a female dick on his tail, and even if they did she wouldn't be it, not with that attractive little face and soft little voice. But there she was.

"I beg your pardon," I said, "but what makes you think so?"

"He must be. I saw him come in and I haven't seen him come out."

"Then he's here. And?"

"Would you mind telling me whose house—who lives here?"

"Nero Wolfe. It's his house and he lives here."

"That's an odd name. Nero Wolfe? What does he—is he a lawyer?"

Either she meant it or she was extremely good. If the former, it would be a pleasure to tell Wolfe and see him grunt. "No," I said. Let her work for it.

"Is Mr. Kirk all right?"

"We haven't been introduced," I said. "My name is Archie Goodwin and I live here. Your turn."

Her mouth opened and closed again. She considered it, her eyes meeting mine exactly as they had when she couldn't see me. "I'm Rita Fougere," she said. "Mrs. Paul Fougere. Will you tell Mr. Kirk I'm here and would like to see him?"

It was my turn to consider. The rule didn't apply—the rule that I am to take no one in to

Wolfe without consulting him; she wanted to see Kirk, not Wolfe. And I was riled. The tie had been mailed to me, not to him; but he hadn't even glanced at me before taking Kirk on and feeding him. I was by no means satisfied that Kirk was straight, and I wanted to see how he took it when Paul Fougere's wife suddenly appeared.

"You might as well tell him yourself," I said. "Also you might as well know that Nero Wolfe is a private detective, and so am I. Come in."

I made room for her and she entered, and after shutting the door I preceded her down the hall and into the office. As I approached Wolfe's desk I said, "Someone to see Mr. Kirk," and I was right there when he twisted around and saw her and said "Rita!" She offered both hands and he took them. "Martin, Martin," she said, low, with those eyes at him.

"But how..." He let her hands go. "How did you know I was here?"

"I followed you."

"Followed me?"

She nodded. "From down there. I was there too, and when I left and was getting into a taxi you came out. I called to you but you didn't hear me, and when you got another taxi I told my driver to follow. I saw you come in here, and I waited

outside, and when you didn't come out, a whole hour..."

"But what... You shouldn't, Rita. You can't... there's nothing you can do. Were you there all night too?"

"No, just this morning. I was afraid... your face, the way you looked. I was terribly afraid. I know I can't... or maybe I can. If you'll come—have you eaten anything?"

"Yes. I thought I couldn't, but Nero Wolfe—" He stopped and turned. "I'm sorry, Mr. Wolfe, Mrs. Fougere." Then back to her: "They think I killed Bonny, but I didn't, and Mr. Wolfe is going to—uh—in-vestigate. That's a swell word, that is—'investigate.' There's nothing you can do, Rita, absolutely nothing, but I... you're a real friend."

She started a hand to touch him but let it drop. "I'll wait for you outside," she said.

"If you please." It was Wolfe. His eyes were on the client. "You have a chore, Mr. Kirk. I need to know if that article is among your belongings in your hotel room, and you will please go and find out and phone me. Meanwhile I'll talk with Mrs. Fougere. —If you will, madam? I'm working for Mr. Kirk."

"Why..." She looked at Kirk. "If he's working for you..."

"I've told him," Kirk blurted. "About Bonny and Paul. He asked and I told him. But you stay out of it."

"Nonsense," Wolfe snapped. "She has been questioned by the police. And she's your friend?"

Her hand went out again, and this time it reached him. "You go, Martin," she said. "Do whatever it is he wants. But you'll come back?"

He said he would and headed for the hall, and I went to see him out. When I returned, Mrs. Fougere was in the red leather chair, which would have held two of her, and Wolfe, leaning back, was regarding her without enthusiasm. He would rather tackle almost any man than any woman on earth.

"Let's get a basis," he growled. "Do you think Mr. Kirk killed his wife?"

She was sitting straight, her hands curled over the ends of the chair arms, her eyes meeting his. "You're working for him," she said.

"Yes. I think he didn't. What do you think?"

"I don't know. And I don't care. I know how that sounds, but I don't care. I'm very . . . well, say very practical. You're not a lawyer?"

"I'm a licensed private detective. Allowing for the strain you're under, you look

twenty. Are you older?"

She did not look twenty. I would have guessed twenty-eight, but I didn't allow enough for the strain, for she said, "I'm twenty-four."

"Since you're practical you won't mind blunt questions. How long have you lived in that house?"

"Since my marriage. Nearly three years."

"Where were you Monday afternoon from one o'clock to eight?"

"Of course the police asked that. I had lunch with Martin Kirk and walked to his office building with him about half past two. Then I went to the Metropolitan Museum of Art to look at costumes. I do some stage costumes. I was there about two hours. Then I—"

"That will do. What did you say when the police asked if you were in the habit of lunching with Mr. Kirk?"

"It wasn't a habit. He had left his wife and he . . . he needed friends."

"You're strongly attached to him?"

"Yes."

"Is he attached to you?"

"No."

Wolfe grunted. "If this were a hostile examination your answers would be admirable, but for me they're a little curt. Do you know how your

husband spent Monday afternoon?"

"I know how he says he did. He went to Long Island City to look at some equipment and got back too late to go to the office. He went to a bar and had drinks, and came home a little before seven, and we went out to a restaurant for dinner." She made a little gesture. "Mr. Wolfe, I don't mean to be curt. If I thought I knew anything that would help Martin, anything at all, I'd tell you."

"Then we'll see what you know. What if I establish that your husband killed Mrs. Kirk?"

She took a moment. "Do you mean if you proved it? If you got him arrested for it?"

Wolfe nodded. "That would probably be necessary to clear Mr. Kirk."

"Then I would be glad for Martin, but sorry for my husband. No matter who killed Bonny Kirk, I would be sorry for him. She deserved . . . no, I won't say that. I believe it, but I won't say it."

"Pfui. More people saying what they believe would be a great improvement. Because I often do I am unfit for common intercourse. You were aware of your husband's intimacy with Mrs. Kirk?"

"Yes."

"They knew you were?"

"Yes."

"You were complacent about it?"

"No." It came out a whisper, and she repeated it, "No." Her mouth began trembling, and she clamped her jaw to stop it. "Of course," she said, "you think I might have killed her. If I had it would have been on account of Martin, not my husband. She was ruining Martin's life, making it impossible for him. But she couldn't ruin my husband's life because he's too—well, too shallow."

She stopped, breathed, and went on, "I wouldn't have dreamed that I would ever be saying things like this, to anyone, but I said some of them even to the police. Now I would say anything if it would help Martin. I wasn't complacent about Paul and Bonny—it just didn't matter because nothing mattered but Martin. I was an ignorant little fool when I married Paul—I thought I might as well because I had never been in love and I thought I never would be. When they began asking me questions yesterday, I decided I wouldn't try to hide how I feel about Martin, and anyway, I don't think I could—not now. I did before."

Wolfe looked at the clock. Twenty to one. Thirty-five minutes till lunch. "You say she

couldn't have ruined your husband's life because he's too shallow. Do you utterly reject the possibility that he killed her?"

She took a breath. "I don't... that's too strong. If he was there with her and she said something or did something... I don't know. I'm not sure."

"Do you know if he had in his possession some of the personal stationery of James Neville Vance? A letterhead, an envelope?"

Her eyes widened. "What? Jimmy Vance?"

"Yes. That's relevant because of a circumstance you don't know about, but Mr. Kirk does. It's a simple question. Did you ever see a blank unused letterhead or envelope, Mr. Vance's, in your apartment?"

"No. Not a blank one. One he had written on, yes."

"You have been in Mr. Vance's apartment?"

"Certainly."

"Do you know where he keeps his stationary?"

"Yes, in a desk in his studio. In a drawer. You say this is relevant?"

"Yes. Mr. Kirk may explain if you ask him. How well do you know Mr. Vance?"

"Why... he owns the house. We see him some socially. There's a recital in his

studio nearly every month."

"Did he kill Mrs. Kirk?"

"No. Of course I've asked myself that. I've asked myself everything. But Jimmy Vance... if you knew him... why would he? Why did you ask about his stationery?"

"Ask Mr. Kirk. I am covering some random points. Did Mrs. Kirk drink vodka?"

"If she did I never saw her. She didn't drink much of anything, but when she did it was always gin and tonic in the summer and Bacardis in the winter."

"Does your husband drink vodka?"

"Yes. Now, nearly always."

"Does Mr. Kirk?"

"No, never. He drinks scotch."

"Does Mr. Vance drink vodka?"

"Yes. He got my husband started on it. The police asked me all this."

"Naturally. Do you drink vodka?"

"No. I drink sherry." She shook her head. "I don't understand—maybe you'll tell me. All the questions the police asked me—they seem to be sure it was one of us, Martin or Paul or Jimmy Vance or me. Now you too. But it could have been some other man that Bonny... or someone, a burglar... couldn't it?"

"Not impossible," Wolfe conceded, "but more than doubtful—because of the circumstance that prompted my question about Mr. Vance's stationery. And now this question: what kind of house-keeper are you? Do you concern yourself with the condition of your husband's clothing?"

She nearly smiled. "You ask the strangest questions. Yes, I do. Even though we're not . . . yes, I sew on buttons."

"Then you know what he has, or had. Have you ever seen among his things a cream-colored necktie with diagonal brown stripes; narrow stripes?"

She frowned. "That's Jimmy Vance again—those are his colors. He has a tie like that, more than one probably."

"He had nine. Again a simple question. Have you ever seen one of them in your husband's possession? Not necessarily in his hands or on his person—say, in one of his drawers?"

"No. Mr. Wolfe, this circumstance—what is it? You say Martin knows about it; but I'm answering your questions, and I—"

The phone rang. I swiveled and got it; used my formula, and the client's voice came: "This is Martin Kirk. Tell Mr. Wolfe the tie's not here. It's gone."

"Of course you made sure."

"Yes. Positive."

"Hold the wire." I turned. "Kirk. The article isn't there."

Wolfe nodded. "As expected."

"Any instructions?"

He pursed his lips, and Rita, on her feet, beat him to it. She asked, "May I speak to him?" and held out her hand for the phone. Wolfe nodded. I pointed to the phone on his desk and told her to use that one, and she went and got it. I stayed on.

"Martin?"

"Yes. Rita?"

"Yes. Where are you?"

"In my room at the hotel. You're still there?"

"Yes. What are you going to do? Are you going to your office?"

"Good lord, no. I'm going to see Jimmy Vance. Then I'm going to see Nero Wolfe again. Someone has—"

I cut in. "Hold it. I've told Mr. Wolfe and he'll have instructions. Hold the phone." I turned. "He says he's going to see Vance. Shall I tell him to lay off or will you?"

"Neither. He's had no sleep and not much to eat. Tell him to come here this evening—say, at nine o'clock, if he's awake—and report on his talk with Mr. Vance."

"You tell him," I said, and hung up. Being a salaried

employee, I should of course keep my place in the presence of company—and that's exactly what I was doing, keeping my place. I had had enough and then some, and Wolfe's glare, which of course came automatically, was wasted because my head was turned and he had my profile, including the set of my jaw. When Rita was through with the phone he took it, spoke briefly with his client, cradled it, and looked at the clock. Six minutes to lunch.

"Do you want me any more?" she asked him.

"Later perhaps," he said. "If you'll phone a little after six?"

I got up and spoke. "If you don't mind, Mrs. Fougere," I crossed to the door to the front room and opened it. "If you'll wait in here just a few minutes?"

She looked at Wolfe, saw that he had no comment, and came. When she had crossed the sill I closed the door, which is as soundproof as the wall, went to Wolfe's desk, and said, "If it blows up in your face you're not going to blame it on me. I merely called your attention a couple of times to the fact that a fee would be welcome. I didn't say it was desperate, that you should grab a measly grand from a character who is probably going to be tagged for the big one. And now when he

says he is going to see Vance, to handle the tie question on his own—and the tie was sent to me, not to you—you not only don't veto it, you don't even tell me to go and sit in. Also she's going there too—that's obvious—and you merely tell her to phone you later. I admit you're a genius, but when you took his check you couldn't possibly have had the faintest idea whether he was guilty or not, and even now you don't know the score. They may have him absolutely wrapped up. The tie was mailed to me and I gave it to Cramer, and I'm asking, not respectfully."

He nodded. "Well said. A good speech."

"Thank you. And?"

"I didn't tell you to go because it's lunch time. Also I doubt if you would get anything useful. Naturally I'll have to see Mr. Vance—and Mr. Fougere. As for desperation, when I took Mr. Kirk's check I knew it was extremely improbable that he had killed his wife."

"How?"

He shook his head. "You call me to account? You know everything that I know; ponder it yourself. If instead of lunch you choose to be present at a futile conversation, do so by all means. I will not be hectored into an explanation you shouldn't need."

When you're good and sore at someone it's simple. You cuss him out—to his face if he's available and privately if he isn't—and you take steps if and as you can. When you're sore at yourself it's even simpler: the subject is right there and can't skip. But when you're sore at yourself and someone else at the same time you're in a fix. If you try to concentrate on one, the other one horns in and gets you off balance.

That was the state I was in as I stood aside in the vestibule of 219 Horn Street while Rita Fougere used her key on the door. In the taxi on the way down I had told her about the necktie problem. She might as well get it from me as later from Kirk, and she might as well understand why Kirk wanted to see Vance.

I supposed she would want to go first to her own apartment on the ground floor; surely any woman would whose face needed attention as much as hers; but no. Straight to the elevator and up, and out at the third floor, and she pressed the button at Vance's door.

It opened and Vance was there. His face wasn't as neat and smooth as it had been the day before, and he had on a different outfit—a conservative gray suit, a white shirt, and a plain gray tie. Of course the

D.A.'s office had had him down too. He said, "Rita!" and put out a hand, then saw me, but I can't say what kind of welcome I would have got because Kirk interrupted, stepping over and telling Rita she shouldn't have come. She said something, but he wasn't listening because he had noticed me.

"I'm glad you're here," he said. "It's not very clear in my mind—what Nero Wolfe told me about the tie. I was just going to tell Vance about him. —Rita, please! You can't—this is *my* trouble."

"Listen, Martin," she said. "You shouldn't be here. I know now why they think it was one of us, so it's *our* trouble. You should leave it to him—Nero Wolfe. You shouldn't be talking about it with anybody, not even me. —Isn't that right, Mr. Goodwin?"

"Mr. Wolfe knew he was coming," I said. I have mentioned that I was sore. "Mr. Wolfe has been called a wizard by various people, and with a wizard you never know. Of course he had me come." I had to force my tongue to let that through, but a private scrap should be kept private.

Vance was frowning at me. "Nero Wolfe had you come? Here?"

"I went to him," Kirk said. "He told me about the necktie."

That's what I want to ask you about. You remember you gave me one, one of those—"

A bell tinkled. I was between Vance and the door, and I moved to let him by. He opened the door and a man stepped in, darted a glance around, and squeaked, "What, a party? A hell of a time for a party, Jimmy."

I say he squeaked because he did, but it was obviously his natural squeak, not the kind on the phone that had told me to burn the tie. But even a natural squeak didn't fit his six feet and broad shoulders and handsome manly face.

"It's no party, Paul," Vance told him, but Paul ignored him and was at Rita: "My pet, you're a perfect fright. You look godawful." He wheeled to Kirk: "And look at you, Martin my boy. Only why not? Why are you still loose?" He looked at me: "Are you a cop?"

I shook my head. "I don't count. Skip me."

"With pleasure." To Vance: "I came to ask you something, and now I can ask everybody. Do you know that the cops have got one of your neckties with a spot on it?"

Vance nodded. "Yes, I know."

"Where did they get it? Why are they riding me about it? Why did they ask me if I had

taken it or one like it out of your closet? Did you tell them I had?"

"Certainly not. I told them one was missing, that's all."

Kirk blurted, "And you told them you gave one like it to me."

Vance frowned at him. "Damn it, Martin, I had to, didn't I? They would have found out anyway. Other people knew about it."

"Of course you had to," Kirk said. "I know that. But that one is missing too. I just looked for it and it's gone. It was taken from my room here before I left because I took everything with me and it's not there—not in my hotel, I mean. I came to ask you if you know—"

"Can it," Paul cut in. "You've got a nerve to ask anybody anything. Why are you loose? Okay, you killed her, she's dead. What kind of dodge are you trying with one of Jimmy's neckties with a spot on it?"

"No," Kirk said. "I didn't kill her."

"Oh, can it. I was thinking maybe you do have some guts after all. She decorated you with one of the finest pairs of horns on record, and you never moved a finger. You just took it lying down—or I should say, standing up. I thought it would

be hard to find a poorer excuse for a man, but yesterday when I heard what had happened—”

Of course I had heard and read of a man slapping another man, but that was the first time I had ever actually seen it—a smack with an open palm on the side of the head. Kirk said nothing; he merely slapped him, and Paul Fougere said nothing either—he merely started a fist for Kirk’s jaw.

I didn’t move. Since Fougere was four inches broader and twenty pounds heavier, I fully expected to see Kirk go down, and in any situation I am supposed to take all necessary steps to protect the interests of a client; but if Wolfe wanted that client protected he could come and do it himself.

But I got a surprise—and so did Fougere. He landed once, a glancing blow on the shoulder as Kirk twisted and jerked his head back; but that was all. Not that Kirk had any technique. I would guess that at last he was doing something he had really wanted to do for a long time, and while spirit isn’t all it’s a lot.

Kirk clipped Fougere at least twenty times, just anywhere—face, neck, chest, ribs—never with enough steam to floor him or even stagger him. But one of the wild pokes got the nose fair and square, and the blood

started. It was up to me because Vance was busy keeping Rita off, and when the blood had Fougere’s mouth and chin pretty well covered I got Kirk from behind and yanked him back and then stepped in between.

“You’re going to drip,” I told Fougere. “I suppose you know where the bathroom is.”

He was panting. He put his hand to his mouth, took it away, saw the blood, and turned and headed for the rear. I pivoted. Kirk, also panting, was on a chair, head down, inspecting his knuckles. They probably had no skin left. Vance was staring at him, apparently as surprised as Fougere had been.

Rita was positively glowing. With color in her face she was more than attractive. “Should I go?” she asked me. “Does he need help?”

That’s true love. Martin the Great had hit him, so he must be in a bad way. It would have been a shame to tell her they had been just pecks. I said no, he’d probably make it, and went to help Kirk examine his knuckles. They weren’t so bad.

“Why didn’t you stop them?” Vance demanded.

“I thought I did,” I said. “With a mauler like Kirk you have to time it.”

“I wouldn’t have thought

... "He let it go. "Did you say he went to Nero Wolfe?"

"No, he did. But I can confirm it, I was present. He has hired Nero Wolfe. That's why I'm here. I am collecting information that will establish the innocence of Mr. Wolfe's client. Have you got any?"

"I'm afraid I haven't." He was frowning. "But of course he is innocent. What Paul Fougere said, that's ridiculous. I hope he didn't tell the police that. But with their experience, I don't suppose—"

The bell tinkled. Vance went to the door and opened it, and in came the law. Anyone with half an eye would know it was the law even if they had never seen or heard of Sergeant Purley Stebbins. Two steps in, he stopped for a look and saw me.

"Yeah," he said, "I thought so. You and Wolfe are going to be good and sick of this one. I hope you try to hang on." His eyes went right. Fougere had appeared at the rear of the room. "Everybody, huh? I'm sorry to interrupt, Mr. Vance."

He moved. "You're wanted downtown for more questions, Mr. Kirk. I'll take you."

Rita made a noise. Kirk tilted his head to look up at the tough rough face. "My God, I've answered all the questions there are."

"We've got some new ones. I might as well ask one of them now. Did you buy a typewriter at the Midtown Office Equipment Company on July nineteenth and trade in your old one?"

"Yes. I don't know—July nineteenth—about then, I guess."

"Okay. We want you to identify the one you traded in. Come along."

"Are you arresting me?"

"If you prefer it that way I can. Material witness. Or if you balk I'll phone for a warrant and keep you company till it comes, maybe an hour. With Goodwin here I've got to toe the line. He's hell on wheels, Goodwin is."

Kirk made it to his feet. "All right," he mumbled. He had been without sleep for thirty hours, maybe more. Rita Fougere aimed those eyes at me.

I bowed out. Being hell on wheels is fine and dandy if you have anywhere to steer for, but I hadn't. I opened the door, went on out, took the elevator down, exchanged no greeting with the driver of the police car out front though we had met, walked till I found a taxi, and told the hackie 618 West 35th Street; and when he said that was Nero Wolfe's house I actually said, "Such is fame."

That's the shape I was in.

Wolfe was at the table in the dining room, putting a gob of his favorite cheese on a wafer. When I entered he looked up and said politely, "Fritz is keeping the kidneys warm."

I stopped three steps in. "Many thanks," I said even more politely. "You were right as usual—the conversation was futile. They had a tail on Kirk, here and to the hotel and on to Horn Street. When Purley Stebbins arrived at Vance's apartment, he knew Kirk was there and he wasn't surprised to see me. He had come for your client and took him. They have found the typewriter that addressed that envelope to me and the message. It belonged to Kirk but on July nineteenth he traded it in on another one. Since you don't talk business at meals, I'll eat in the kitchen."

I wheeled, hell on wheels, and went to the kitchen.

Nearly four hours later, at six o'clock, Mr. and Mrs. Paul Fougere were in the office waiting for Wolfe to come down from the plant rooms—she in the red leather chair and he in one of the yellow ones in front of Wolfe's desk. To my surprise he had two marks, a red and slightly puffed nose and a little bruise under his left eye. I hadn't thought Kirk had

shown that much power, but of course with bare knuckles it doesn't take much.

Nothing had happened to change my attitude or opinion. When I went to the office after finishing the kept-warm kidneys and accessories, Wolfe permitted me to report on the conversation and slugging match at Vance's apartment, leaning back and closing his eyes to show he was listening, but he didn't even grunt when I told the Stebbins part, though ordinarily it gets under his skin, 'way under, when a client is hauled in. When I was through I said it was a good thing he knew Kirk was innocent since otherwise the typewriter development might make him wonder.

His eyes opened. "I didn't say I knew it. I said it was extremely improbable that he had killed his wife, and it still is. Any of the others could have managed access to his typewriter for a few minutes, in his absence."

"Sure. And when his wife told him she had let someone use it, it made him so mad he got rid of it the next day. She could confirm that, but she's dead. Tough. Or his getting rid of it just then could have been coincidence, but that would be even tougher. Judges and juries hate coincidence, and I've heard

you make remarks about it."

"Only when it's in my way, not when it serves me." He straightened up and reached for his book. "Can Mrs. Fougere have her husband here at six o'clock?"

"I haven't asked her. I doubt it. They're not chummy, and he's the wrong end of the horse."

"Perhaps . . ." He considered it. He shook his head. "No. I must see him. Tell her to tell him, or you tell him, that he has slandered my client before witnesses, and he will either sign a retraction and apology or defend a suit for defamation of character. I'll expect him at six o'clock." He picked up the book and opened it.

Cut. I hadn't expected him to open up, since he is as pigheaded as I am steadfast, but he could have made some little comment. As I looked up the Fougere number and dialed it, I was actually considering something I had never done and thought I never would: retract, apologize, and ask him please to tell me, as a favor to an old associate and loyal assistant, what the hell was in his mind if anything. But of course I didn't.

When I hung up after getting no answer from the Fougere number I had an idea: I would ask Wolfe if he wanted me to

phone Parker. With a client collared as a material witness and probably headed for the coop on a murder charge, it should be not only routine but automatic for him to get Parker, the lawyer he always called in when he had to use law. But I looked at his face as he sat, comfortable, his eyes on the book, and vetoed it. He would merely say no and go on reading.

It would have improved my feelings to pick up something and throw it at him, but it would not improve the situation; so I arose, went to the hall and up two flights to my room, stood at the window, and reviewed the past thirty hours, trying to spot the catch I had missed, granting there had been one. The trouble was I was sore. You can work when you're sore, or eat or sleep or fight, but you can't think straight.

My next sight of Wolfe was at two minutes past six when the elevator brought him down from the plant rooms and he entered the office. The slander approach had got results. The fifth time I tried the Fougere number, a little after four, Paul had answered, and I poured it on. On the phone his squeak sounded more like the one that had told me to burn the tie, but of course it would. A voice on a phone, unless it's one you know

well, is tricky. He said he'd come.

An hour later Rita phoned. She was too frantic to be practical. She wanted to know if we had heard from Kirk, and were we doing anything, and if so what, and shouldn't Kirk have a lawyer. Being sore, I told her Wolfe was responsible to his client, not to her, that Kirk would of course need a lawyer if and when he was charged with something, and that we were expecting her husband at six o'clock. When she said she knew that and was coming along, I said she might as well have saved the dime.

I am rude to people only when I am being rude to myself, or they have asked for it. I admit she hadn't asked for it.

For Wolfe, being rude is no problem at all. When he entered he detoured around the red leather chair to his desk, gave Rita a nod, sat, narrowed his eyes at the husband, and snapped, "You're Paul Fougere?"

It's hard to snap back with a squeak, but Fougere did the best he could with what he had. "You're Nero Wolfe?"

"I am. Did you kill that woman?"

I had known when I let them in that Fougere had decided on his line. It's easy to see when a

man's all set. So the unexpected question flustered him. "You know damn well I didn't," he said. "You know who did or you ought to."

"Possibly I don't. Do you?"

Fougere looked at his wife, at me, and back at Wolfe. He was adjusting. "You'd like that, wouldn't you?" he said. "With witnesses. All right, I can't prove it, and anyway that's not up to me, it's up to the cops. But I'm not going to sign anything. I've told Vance I shouldn't have said it, and I've told my wife. Ask her." He turned to me. "You were the only other one that heard me. I'm telling you now, I can't prove it and I shouldn't have said it." Back to Wolfe: "That covers it. Now try hooking me for defamation of character."

"Pfui," Wolfe flipped a hand to dismiss it. "I never intended to. That was only to get you here. I wanted to tell you something and to ask you something. First, you're a blatherskite. You may perhaps know that Mr. Kirk *didn't* kill his wife, but you can't possibly know that he *did*. Manifestly you're either a jackass or a murderer, and conceivably both." He turned his head. "Archie. A twenty-dollar bill, please."

I went to the safe and got a twenty from the petty cash

drawer and came back and offered it, but he shook his head. "Give it to Mrs. Fougere." To Paul: "I assume your wife is an acceptable stakeholder. Give her a dollar. Twenty to one that Mr. Kirk did *not* kill his wife."

"You've got a bet." Fougere pulled out his wallet, extracted a bill, and handed it to me. "You keep it, Goodwin. My wife might spend it. I suppose his conviction decides it? Do I have to wait until after the appeals and all the horsing around?"

Obviously Rita wasn't hearing him. Probably she had had a lot of practice at not hearing him. She was gazing at Wolfe. "You really mean that, don't you?" she asked. "You mean it?"

"I expect to win that dollar, madam." His eyes stayed on Fougere. "As for you, sir, let's see how sure you are. I would like to ask some questions which may give you a hint of my expectations. If you don't care to hear them you are of course at liberty to go."

Fougere laughed. It would be fair to say that he giggled, but I'll give him a break. He laughed. "Hell, I've got a bet down," he said. "Go right ahead. You've already asked me if I killed her. I've answered that."

Wolfe nodded. "But you're not a mere onlooker. You're not in the audience; you're on the stage. Do you know about the envelope Mr. Goodwin received in the mail yesterday morning and its contents?"

"Yes, I do now. From Vance and my wife."

"Then you know why attention is centered on you four—both the police's attention and mine. You all had opportunity: any of you could have been admitted to that apartment Monday afternoon by Mrs. Kirk, and Mr. Kirk had a key. The means, the vodka bottle—the murder weapon—was at hand. What about motive? Let's consider that. That's what I want to discuss with you. You are well acquainted with those three people and their relationships, both with one another and with Mrs. Kirk. Your adroit handling of my charge of slander showed that you have a facile and ingenious mind. I invite you to exercise it. Start with yourself. If you killed Mrs. Kirk, what was your motive?"

Fougere pronounced a word that isn't supposed to be used with a lady present, and since some lady may read this I'll skip it. He added, "I didn't."

"I know. I'll rephrase it. If you had killed Mrs. Kirk what would have been your motive?"

"You're staying to hear my questions because you're curious. I'm curious too. What would have been your motive? Is it inconceivable that you could have had one? You need not be reserved because your wife is here—she has informed me of your intimacy with Mrs. Kirk. When I suggested to her the possibility that you had killed her, she said no, you were too shallow. Are you?"

Fougere looked at Rita. "That's a new one, my pet. Shallow. You should have told me." To Wolfe: "Certainly I could have had a motive for killing her. I could name four men that could—five, counting Kirk."

"What would yours have been?"

"That would depend on when. Two months ago it would have been for my ... well, for my health."

"And Monday? I'm not just prattling. Monday?"

"It's prattle to me. Monday, that would have been different. It would still have been for my health, but in a different way. Very different. Do you want me to spell it out?"

"I think not. If your wife killed her, what was her motive?"

"Now that's a thought." He grinned. "That appeals to me. We hadn't touched each other

for nearly a year and she wanted me back. I'm shallow, but I've got charm. I'm not using it right now, but I've got it, don't think I haven't."

I was looking at Rita because I had had enough of looking at him, and from the expression on her face I would have given twenty to one that she was thinking what I was: that he was one in a million. He actually had no idea of how she felt about Kirk. Not that he would necessarily have brought it in, but his tone, even more than his words, made it obvious. I took another look at him. A man that dumb could batter a woman's skull with a vodka bottle and mosey to the nearest bar and order a vodka and tonic.

Wolfe had the thought too, for he asked, "Have you no other motive to suggest for your wife?"

"No. Isn't that enough? A jealous wife?"

"There are precedents. I assume Mr. Kirk presents no difficulty. Since you think you know he killed her, you must know why."

"So do you."

"Correct—since like the others it's an if. He could no longer abide her infidelities, he couldn't break loose because he was infatuated, and he couldn't change her—so he took the only

way out, since he wanted to live. You agree?"

"Sure. That has precedents too."

"It has indeed. That leaves only Mr. Vance, and I suppose he does present difficulties, but call on your ingenuity. If he killed her, why?"

Fougere shook his head. "That would take more than ingenuity. You might as well pass Jimmy Vance. He was still hoping."

"Hoping for what?"

"For her. She had poor Jimmy on a string, and he was still hoping."

"Mr. Kirk told me that she regarded him as a nice old guy—his phrase—and rather a bore."

Fougere grinned. I had decided the first time he grinned that I would never grin again. "Martin wouldn't know," he said. "She told me all about it. She had a lot of fun with Jimmy. Bore, my eye! When she was bored she would go up and use one of his pianos—that was just an excuse—and dangle him. Of course it wasn't only fun. He had started it, reaching for her, and he owned the house and she liked it there, so she played him."

"But he was still hoping?"

"Oh, sure—for her that was easy. If you had known Bonny—hell, she could have

played you and kept you hoping. Bonny could play any man alive."

"Have you told the police this?"

"You mean about Vance? No. Why would I? I don't know why I'm telling you."

"I invited it. I worked for it." Wolfe leaned back and took a deep breath, then another one. "I am obliged to you, sir, and I don't like to be in debt. I'll save you a dollar. We'll call the bet off."

"We will not," Fougere squeaked. "You want to welsh?"

"No. I want to show my appreciation. Very well; it can be returned to you." Wolfe swiveled. "Madam, it's fortunate that you came with your husband. There will be three of us to refresh his memory on what he has told me if at some future time he is inclined to forget. I suggest that you should write it down and . . ."

I was listening with only one ear. Now that I knew which target he was aiming at, I should certainly be able to spot what had made him pick it, and I shut my eyes to concentrate. If you have already spotted it, as you probably have, and are thinking I'm thick, you will please consider that all four points went back to before the body was discovered.

I got one point in half a minute, but that wasn't enough, and by the time I opened my eyes Fougere had gone and Rita was on her feet, prattling. Wolfe looked at me. I am expected—by him—both to understand women and to know how to handle them, which is ridiculous. I'll skip how I handled her and got her out because I was rude again, making twice in less than two hours.

When I returned to the office after shutting the door behind her I had things to say; but Wolfe was leaning back with his eyes closed, and his lips were working, so I went to my desk and sat. When we're alone I'll interrupt him no matter what he's doing—with only one exception, the lip exercise. When he's pushing his lips out and then pulling them in, out and in, he's working so hard that if I spoke he wouldn't hear me. It may take only seconds or it may go on and on. That time it was a good three minutes.

He opened his eyes, sat up, and growled, "We're going to need Mrs. Fougere."

I stood up. "I might possibly catch her. Is it urgent?"

"No. After dinner will do. Confound it."

"I agree." I sat down. "I'm up with you. There were two things. Right?"

"Four."

"Then I'm shy a couple. I have his phoning and his letting me have the tie. What else?"

"Only seven ties. Why?"

"Oh." I looked at it. "Okay. And?"

"Well... take you. What have you that is a part of you? Say the relics you keep in a locked drawer. Would you give one of them to someone casually?"

"No." I gave that a longer look. "Uh-huh," I conceded. "Check. But all four points wouldn't convince a jury that he's a murderer, and I doubt if they would convince Cramer or the D.A. that he ought to be jugged."

"Certainly not. We have a job before we're ready for Mr. Cramer, and not an easy one. Phenomena needed for proof may not exist, and even if they do they may be undiscoverable. Our only recourse—"

The doorbell rang. I got up and went to the hall, took a look, stepped back into the office, and said, "Nuts. Cramer."

"No," he snapped.

"Do you want to count ten?"

"No."

I admit it's a pleasure to slip the bolt in, open the door the two inches the chain permits, and through the crack tell a police inspector that Mr. Wolfe

is engaged and can't be disturbed. The simple pleasure of a private detective. But that time I didn't have it. I was still a step short of the door when a bellow came from the office, my name, and I turned and went back.

"Bring him," Wolfe commanded.

The doorbell rang. "Maybe this time you *should* count ten," I suggested.

"No. Bring him."

I went. From my long acquaintance with Cramer's face I can tell with one glance through the glass if he's on the warpath, so I knew he wasn't before I opened the door. He even greeted me as if it didn't hurt. Of course he didn't let me take his hat—that would have been going too far; but he removed it on his way down the hall. When he's boiling he leaves it on. From the way he greeted Wolfe it seemed likely that he would have offered a hand to shake if he hadn't known that Wolfe never did.

"Another hot day," he said, and sat in the red leather chair, not settling back, and hanging onto his hat. "I just stopped in on my way home. You're never on your way home because you're always home."

I stared at him. Unbelievable. He was chatting!

Wolfe grunted. "I go out

now and then. Will you have some beer?" That was logical. If Cramer acted like a guest, Wolfe had to act like a host.

"No, thanks." Pals. "A couple of questions and I'll go. The District Attorney has about decided to hold Martin Kirk on a homicide charge. Kirk was here today for over an hour. Are you working for him?"

"Yes."

Cramer put his hat on the stand at his elbow. "I'm not going to pretend that I'm here to hand you something—like a chance to cut loose from a murderer. The fact is, frankly, I think it's possible the D.A.'s office is moving a little too fast. There are several reasons why I think that. The fact that you have taken Kirk on as a client isn't the most important one, but I admit it is one. You don't take on a murder suspect, no matter what he can pay, unless you think you can clear him. I said a couple of questions and here's the second one. If I go back downtown instead of home to supper, to persuade the D.A. to go slow, have you got anything I can use?"

One corner of Wolfe's mouth went up a sixteenth of an inch, his kind of a smile. "A new approach, Mr. Cramer. Rather transparent."

"The hell it is. It's a compliment. I wouldn't use it

with any other private dick alive, and you know it. I'm not shoving, I'm just asking."

"Well. It's barely possible..." Wolfe focused narrowed eyes on a corner of his desk and rubbed his nose with a fingertip. Pure fake. He had had his idea, whatever it was, when he bellowed me back to the office. He held the pose for ten seconds and then moved his eyes to Cramer and said, "I know who killed Mrs. Kirk."

"Uh-huh. The D.A. thinks he does."

"He's wrong. I have a proposal. I suppose you have spoken with Mr. Vance, James Neville Vance. If you will send a man to his apartment at ten o'clock this evening to bring him to you, and if you keep him until you hear from me or Mr. Goodwin, and then send or bring him to me, I'll give you enough to persuade the District Attorney that he shouldn't hold Mr. Kirk on any charge at all."

Cramer had his chin up.

"Vance? Vance?"

"Yes, sir."

"My God." He looked at me but saw only a manly open face. He took a cigar from his pocket, slow motion, stuck it in his mouth, clamped his teeth on it, and took it out again. "You know damn well I won't. Connive at illegal entry? That's why you want him away."

"Merely your conjecture. I give you the fullest assurance, in good faith without reservation, that there will be no illegal entry or any other illegal act."

"Then I don't see..." Moving back in the chair, he lost the cigar. It dropped to the floor. He ignored it. "No. Vance is a respectable citizen in good standing. You'd have to open up."

Wolfe nodded. "I'm prepared to. Not to give you facts, for you already have them; I'll merely expound. You shouldn't need it, but you have been centered on Mr. Kirk. Do you know all the details of the necktie episode? Mr. Goodwin getting it in the mail, the phone call he received, and his visit to Mr. Vance?"

"Yes."

"Then attend. Four points. First, the phone call. It came at a quarter past eleven. You assume that Mr. Kirk made it, pretending he was Vance. That's untenable, or at least implausible. How would he dare? For all he knew, Mr. Goodwin had phoned Vance or seen him immediately after opening the envelope. For him to phone and say he was Vance would have been asinine."

Cramer grunted. "He was off his hinges. The shape he was in, he wouldn't see that."

"I concede the possibility."

Second point. When Mr. Goodwin went to see Vance he showed him the envelope and letterhead and let him take the tie to examine it. Vance was completely mystified. You know what was said and done. He inspected the ties in his closet and said the one that had been mailed to Mr. Goodwin was his. But when Mr. Goodwin asked for it he handed it over without hesitation. Preposterous."

Cramer shook his head. "I don't think so. The body hadn't been discovered. He thought it was just some screwy gag."

"Pfui! One of his ties taken from his closet, his stationery used to mail it to a private detective with a message ostensibly from him, and the phone call; and he was so devoid of curiosity or annoyance that he let Mr. Goodwin take the tie, and the envelope and letterhead, with no sign of reluctance? Nonsense."

"But he did. If he killed her why isn't it still nonsense?"

"Because it was part of his devious plan." Wolfe looked at the clock. "It's too close to dinnertime to go into that now. The plan was ill-conceived and ill-executed, and it was infantile, but it wasn't nonsense. Now, the third point: two missing neckties. He had nine and had given one to Mr. Kirk,

and there were only seven left. Of course you have accounted for that in your theory. How?"

"That's obvious. Kirk took it from Vance's closet. Part of his plan to implicate Vance."

Wolfe nodded. "As Vance intended you to believe. But have you examined that assumption thoroughly?"

"Yes. I don't like it. That's one reason I think the D.A. is moving too fast. Kirk would have been a sap to do that. Someone else could have taken it to implicate Kirk. For instance, Fougere."

"Why not Vance himself?"

"Because a man doesn't smash a woman's skull unless he has a damn good reason and Vance had no reason at all."

Wolfe grunted. "I challenge that. But first, the fourth point. Those neckties were an integral item of James Neville Vance's projection of his selfhood. Made exclusively for him, they were more than merely distinctive and personal; they were morsels of his ego. Conceivably he might have given one of them to someone close and dear to him, but not to Martin Kirk—not unless it was an essential step in an undertaking of vital importance. So it was."

"Damn it," Cramer growled, "his reason!"

A corner of Wolfe's mouth went up. "Your new approach

is an improvement, Mr. Cramer. You know I wouldn't fix on a man as a murderer without a motive, so I must have one for Mr. Vance, and you want it. But not now. You would get up and go. That would be enough for you to take to the District Attorney; and while it would postpone a murder charge against my client it would by no means clear him permanently, because I strongly doubt if you can get enough evidence against Vance to hold him, let alone convict him. My knowledge of Vance's motive is by hearsay, so don't bother to warn me about withholding evidence; I have none that you don't have. If I get some I'll be glad to share it. I need to know with certainty where Mr. Vance will be this evening from ten o'clock on, and when Mr. Goodwin told me you were at the door it occurred to me that the surest way would be for you to have him with you. Do you want it in writing, signed by both of us, that there will be no illegal act—under penalty of losing our licenses?"

Cramer uttered a word about the same flavor as the one Fougere had used, but of course there was no lady present. He followed it up: "I suppose I'd send it to the Commissioner so he could frame it?" He flattened his palms on the chair

arms. "Look, Wolfe. I know you. I know you've got something. I admit your four points taken together add up. I'll take your word that you won't send Goodwin to break and enter. I know I can't pry any more out of you even if it wasn't time for you to eat, and anyway I eat too. But you say I'm to keep Vance until I hear from you or Goodwin, and that might mean all night, and he's not just some bum. Make it tomorrow morning, say ten o'clock, and limit it to six hours if I *don't* hear from you or Goodwin, and I'll buy it."

Wolfe grunted. "That's better anyway. I was rushing it. I said send a man to get him."

"I heard you."

"Very well." Wolfe turned. "Archie. Mr. Cramer and I need a few minutes to make sure of details. Tell Fritz. And use the phone in the kitchen to get Mrs. Fougere. I must see her this evening. Also get Saul and Fred and Orrie. I want them either this evening or at eight in the morning."

I rose. "Does it matter which?"

"No."

I beat it to the kitchen.

If you ever need an operative and only the best will do, get Saul Panzer if you can. Ten bucks an hour. If Saul isn't

available get Fred Durkin or Orrie Cather. Seven-fifty an hour and they usually earn it. That was the trio who entered James Neville Vance's apartment with me at a quarter past ten on Thursday morning.

What made the entry legal was that when I rang the bells, both downstairs and upstairs, the doors were opened from the inside. Who opened them was Rita Fougere. Upstairs she held it open until we were in and then closed it. I preferred not to touch the door—not that it mattered, but I like things neat.

The door shut, Rita turned to me. She still had those eyes, but the lids were puffy, and her face had had no attention at all. "Where's Martin?" she asked. Her soft little voice was more like a croak. "Have you heard from him?"

I shook my head. "As Mr. Wolfe told you last evening, he's being held as a material witness. Getting a lawyer to arrange for bail would cost money—his money. This will be cheaper and better if it works. Mr. Wolfe told you that."

"I know, but . . . what if it doesn't?"

"That's his department." I turned. "This is Mr. Panzer. Mr. Durkin. Mr. Cather. They know who you are. As you know, you're to stay put, and if you'd like to help you might make

some coffee. If the phone rings answer it. If the doorbell rings *don't* answer it. Right?"

"Yes."

"Okay. —Gentleman, sick 'em."

The way you prowl a place depends on what you're after. If you're looking for one large item—say, a stolen elephant—then of course it's simple. The toughest is when you're just looking. We did want one specific item—a necktie; but we also wanted anything whatever that might help, no matter what, and Saul and Fred and Orrie had been thoroughly briefed.

So we were just looking after Saul found the necktie; and that means things like inspecting the seams of a mattress and unfolding handkerchiefs and flipping through the pages of books. It takes a lot longer when you are leaving everything exactly as it was.

We had been at it over an hour when Saul found the tie. I had shown them the seven on the rack in the closet so they would know what it looked like. Saul and Orrie were up in the studio, and when I heard them coming down the spiral stair I knew they had something and met them at the foot, and Saul handed it to me. It was folded, and pinned to it was one of Vance's engraved letter-

heads on which Saul had written: "Found by me at 11:25 A.M. on August 9, 1962, inside a piano score of Scriabin's *Vers la Flamme* which was in a cabinet in the studio of James Neville Vance at 219 Horn Street, Manhattan, New York City." He had signed it with his little twirl on the tail of the z.

"You're my hero," I told him. "It would be an honor to tie your shoestrings and I want your autograph. But you know how Orrie is on gags and so do I. We'll take a look."

I entered the bedroom, with them following, and went to the closet. The seven were still on the rack; I counted them twice. "Okay," I told Saul, "it's it. I'll vote for you for President." I took the seven from the rack and handed them to him. "Here, we'll take them along."

After that it was just looking, both in the apartment and in the studio, and that gets tedious. By two o'clock it was damn tedious because we were hungry and had decided not to take time out to eat; but Cramer had agreed to keep Vance for only six hours, and while we had Exhibit A and that was all Wolfe really expected, an Exhibit B would be deeply appreciated. So we kept at it.

A little before three o'clock I was standing in the middle of the living room frowning around. Rita was lying on a couch with her eyes closed. Fred was up in the studio with Saul and Orrie. I was trying to remember some little something that had been in my mind an hour ago, and finally I did. When Fred had taken a pile of gloves from a drawer he had looked in each glove but hadn't felt in it, and he hadn't taken them to the light.

I went to the bedroom, got the gloves from the drawer, took them to the window, and really looked; and in the fifth glove, a pigskin hand-sewed number, there was Exhibit B. When I saw it inside the glove I thought it was just a gob of some kind of junk; but when I pulled it out and saw what it was I felt something I hadn't felt very often—a hot spot at the base of my spine. I don't often talk to myself either, but I said aloud, "Believe it or not, that's exactly what it is. It has to be."

I put it back in the glove, put the glove in my pocket, returned the other gloves to the drawer, went to the phone and dialed a number.

Wolfe's voice came: "Yes?" I've been trying for years to get him to answer the phone properly:

"Me," I said. "We'll be there in less than half an hour. Saul found the tie. It was in a piano score in a cabinet in the studio. I just found Exhibit B. I can tell you what he did. After he killed her he cut off a lock of her hair with blood on it, plenty of blood, and took it for a keepsake. After the blood was dry he put it inside one of his gloves in a drawer, which is where I found it. That has to be it. You may not believe it till you see it, but you will then."

"Indeed." A pause. "Satisfactory. Very satisfactory. Bring the glove."

"Certainly. A suggestion—or call it a request. Tell Cramer to have him there at a quarter after four, or half past. We're starving, including Mrs. Fougere, and we need time to—"

"You know my schedule. I'll tell Mr. Cramer six o'clock."

"No." I was emphatic. "For once you'll have to skip it. The six hours is up at four o'clock, and if you put it off until six, Cramer may let him go home, with or without an escort, and he might find that both the tie and the keepsake are gone. Would that be satisfactory?"

Silence. "No." More silence. "Confound it." Still more. "Very well. Fritz will have something ready."

"Better make it half past and—"

He had hung up.

Inspector Cramer settled back in the red leather chair, narrowed his eyes at Wolfe, and rasped, "I've told Mr. Vance that this won't be on any official record and he can answer your questions or not as he pleases."

He wouldn't have settled back if he had been the only city employee present, since he knew that almost certainly some fur was going to fly. Sergeant Purley Stebbins was there at his right on a chair against the wall. Purley never sits with his back to anyone, even his superior officer.

James Neville Vance was on a chair facing Wolfe's desk, between Cramer and me. Rita Fougere was on the couch at the left of my desk, and Saul and Fred and Orrie were grouped over by the big globe.

"There won't be many questions," Wolfe told Cramer. "Nothing remains to be satisfied but my curiosity on a point or two." His head turned. "Mr. Vance, only you can satisfy it." To me: "Archie?"

I regretted having to take my eyes away from Vance. Not that I thought he needed watching; it was just that I wanted to. You can learn things, or you think you can, from the face of a man who

knows something is headed for him but doesn't know exactly what and is trying to be ready to meet it. Up to that point Vance's face hadn't increased my knowledge of human nature. His lips were drawn in tight, and that made his oversized chin even more out of proportion. When Wolfe cued me I had to leave it.

I got the seven ties from a drawer, put them in a row on Wolfe's desk, and stood by.

"Those," Wolfe told Vance, "are the seven ties that remained on the rack in your closet. I produce them—"

A growl from Cramer stopped him. It would have stopped anybody. It became words: "So you did—Stebbins, take Mr. Vance out to the car. I want to talk to Wolfe."

"No," Wolfe snapped. "I said there would be no illegal entry and there wasn't. Mr. Goodwin, accompanied by Mr. Panzer, Mr. Durkin, and Mr. Cather, rang the bell at Mr. Vance's apartment and were admitted by Mrs. Fougere. She was in the apartment with Mr. Vance's knowledge and consent, having gone there earlier to talk with him. When an officer came to take him to you she remained, with no objection from him. —Isn't that correct, Mrs. Fougere?"

"Yes." It came out—a

whisper, and she repeated it. "Yes." That time it was a croak.

"Isn't that correct, Mr. Vance?"

Vance's drawn-in lips opened and then closed. "I don't think..." he mumbled. He raised his voice: "I'm not going to answer that."

"You might answer me," Cramer said. "Is it correct?"

"I prefer not to answer."

"Then I'll proceed," Wolfe said. "I produce these seven ties merely to establish them." He opened a drawer and produced Exhibit A. "Here is an eighth tie. Rinned to it is a statement written and signed by Mr. Panzer, on your stationery. I'll read it." He did so. "Have you any comment?"

No comment.

"Let me see that," Cramer growled. Of course he would; that's why I was standing by. I took it from Wolfe and handed it over. He read the statement, twisted around for a look at Saul, and twisted the other way to hand the exhibit to Stebbins.

"It's just as well I haven't many questions," Wolfe told Vance, "since apparently the few I do have won't be answered. I'll try answering them myself, and if you care to correct me do so. I invite interruptions."

He cocked his head. "You

realize, sir, that the facts are manifest. The problem is not what you did, or when or how, but why. As for when, you typed that envelope and message to Mr. Goodwin, using your own stationery and having found or made an opportunity to use Mr. Kirk's typewriter, at least three weeks ago, since that machine wasn't available after July nineteenth. Mr. Kirk's disposing of it just then was of course coincidental. So your undertaking was not only premeditated, it was carefully planned. Also you retrieved the tie you had given Mr. Kirk before he moved from his apartment. Using the typewriter and retrieving the tie presented no difficulty, since you owned the house and had master keys. Any comment?"

No.

"Then I'll continue. Only the whys are left, and I'll leave the most important one—why you killed her—to the last. For some of them I can offer only one conjecture—for instance, why you wished to implicate Mr. Kirk. It may have been a fatuous effort to divert attention from yourself; or, more likely, you merely wanted it known that Mrs. Kirk had not been the victim of some chance intruder; or you had an animus against Mr. Kirk. Any of those would serve. For other whys I

can do better than conjecture. Why did you take a tie from your closet and hide it in your studio? That was part of the design to implicate Mr. Kirk, and it was rather shrewd. You calculated—"

"I didn't," Vance blurted. "Kirk did that, he must have. You say it was found in a piano score?"

Wolfe nodded. "That's your rebuttal, naturally. You intended the necktie maneuver to appear as a clumsy stratagem by Mr. Kirk to implicate you. So of course a tie had to be missing from the rack in your closet. But if Mr. Kirk had taken it he wouldn't have hid it in your studio; he would have destroyed it. Why then didn't you destroy it? You know; I don't; but I can guess. You thought it possible that the situation might so develop that you could somehow use it, so why not keep it?"

Wolfe's shoulders went up a quarter of an inch and down again. "Another why: why did you send the tie to Mr. Goodwin? Of course you had to send it to someone—an essential step in the scheme to involve Mr. Kirk. But why Mr. Goodwin? That's the point I'm chiefly curious about, and I would sincerely appreciate an answer. Why did you send the tie to Mr. Goodwin?"

"I didn't."

"Very well, I can't insist. It's only that he is my confidential assistant, and I would like to know how you got the strange notion that he would best serve your purpose. He is inquisitive, impetuous, alert, skeptical, pertinacious, and resourceful—together the worst choice you could possibly have made. One more why before the last and crucial one: why did you phone Mr. Goodwin to burn the tie? That was unnecessary, because his curiosity was sufficiently aroused without that added fillip; and it was witless, because whoever phoned must have known that he had not already phoned you or gone to see you, and only you could have known that. Do you wish to comment?"

"I didn't phone him."

I must say that Vance was showing more gumption than I had expected. By letting Wolfe talk he was finding out exactly how deep the hole was, and he was admitting nothing.

Wolfe turned a hand over. "Now the primary why: why did you kill her? I learned yesterday that you probably had an adequate motive, but as I told Mr. Cramer, that was only hearsay. I have to have a demonstrable fact, an act or an object, and you supplied it. Not yesterday or today; you sup-

plied it Tuesday afternoon when, after killing Mrs. Kirk, you stooped over her battered skull, or knelt or squatted, and cut off a lock of her hair, choosing one that had her blood on it. With a knife or scissors? Did you stoop, or squat, or kneel?"

Vance's lips moved, but no sound came. Unquestionably he was trying to say "I didn't"—but he couldn't make it.

Wolfe grunted. "I said a demonstrable fact. To demonstrate is to establish as true, and I'll establish it. Mr. Goodwin found the lock of hair, caked with blood, some two hours ago, in a drawer in your bedroom. He called it a keepsake, but a keepsake is something given and kept for the sake of the giver, a token of friendship. 'Trophy' would be a better term." He opened a desk drawer.

I can move fast and so can Purley Stebbins; but we both misjudged James Neville Vance—at least, I did. When he started up at sight of the glove that Wolfe took from the drawer I started, too, but I wasn't expecting him to dart like lightning, and he did; and he got the glove, snatched it out of Wolfe's hand.

Of course he didn't keep it long. I came from his left side and Purley from his right, and

since he had the glove in his right hand it was Purley who got his wrist and twisted it, and the glove dropped to the floor.

Cramer picked it up. Purley had Vance by the right arm and I had him by the left.

Wolfe stood up. "It's in the glove," he told Cramer. "Mr. Goodwin will furnish any details you require, and Mrs. Fougere." He headed for the door. The clock said 5:22. His schedule had hit a snag, but by gum it wasn't wrecked.

A little before five o'clock one afternoon last week the doorbell rang, and through the one-way glass I saw Martin Kirk.

When I opened the door, snow came whirling in. Obviously he was calling on me, not Wolfe; since he knew the schedule, and I was glad to see an ex-client who had paid his bill promptly; so I took his hat and coat and put them on the rack, and ushered him to the office and a chair.

When we had exchanged a few remarks about the weather, and his health and mine, and Wolfe's, and he had declined an offer of a drink, he said he saw that Vance's lawyer was trying a new approach on an appeal, and I said yeah, when you've got money you can do a lot of dodging. With that disposed of,

he said he often wondered where he would be now if he hadn't come straight to Wolfe from the D.A.'s office that day in August.

"Look," I said, "you've said that before. I have all the time there is and I enjoy your company, but you didn't come all the way here through the worst storm this winter just to chew the fat. Something on your mind?"

He nodded. "I thought you might know . . . might have an idea."

"I seldom do, but it's possible."

"It's Rita. You know she's in Reno?"

"Yes, I've had a card from her."

"Well, I phoned her yesterday. There's some good ski slopes not far from Reno, and I told her I might go out for a week or so and we could give them a try. She said no. A flat no."

"Maybe she doesn't know how to ski."

"Sure she does. She's good, very good." He uncrossed his legs and crossed them again. "I came to see you because . . . well, frankly, I thought that maybe you and she have a—an understanding. I used to think she liked me all right—nothing more than that, but I thought she liked me. I know she was a

friend in need—I know what she did that day in Vance's apartment. But ever since then she has shied away from me. And I know she thinks you're quite a guy. Well...if you *have* got an understanding with her I want to congratulate you."

I cleared my throat. "Many thanks," I said. "For the compliment. It's nice to know that she thinks I'm quite a guy, but it's nothing more than that. There's not only no understanding, there's no misunderstanding. It's possible that she actually likes you. It's possible that she would enjoy skiing with you, though in my opinion anyone who enjoys skiing is hard up for something to enjoy, but a woman in the process of getting a divorce is apt to be skittish. She either thinks she has been swindled or she feels like a used car. Do you want my advice?"

"Yes."

"Go to Reno unannounced.

—Tell her you want her to go skiing with you because if you

tumble and break a leg, as you probably will, she is the only one you can rely on to bring help. If after a week or so you want to tell her there are other reasons, and if there *are* other reasons, she may possibly be willing to listen. She might even enjoy it. You have nothing to lose but a week or so unless you break your neck."

His jaw was working exactly the way it had that day six months back, but otherwise his appearance was very different. "All right," he said. "I'm glad I came. I'll go tomorrow."

"That's the spirit. I don't suppose you'd consider playing pinochle with her, or dancing, or going for a walk, instead of skiing?"

"No. I'm not a good dancer."

"Okay. We'll drink to it." I got up. "Scotch and water, I believe?"

"Yes, please. No ice. I think you're quite a guy too, Goodwin."

"So do I." I went to the kitchen.

Donald E. Westlake

The Sweetest Man in the World

A whiz of a story, packed with plot—and with surprises... Chuckle with the author of THE FUGITIVE PIGEON, THE BUSY BODY, and THE HOT ROCK...

I adjusted my hair in the hall mirror before opening the door. My hair was gray, and piled neatly on top of my head. I smoothed my skirt, took a deep breath, and opened the door.

The man in the hallway was thirtyish, well-dressed, quietly handsome, and carrying a brief case. He was also somewhat taken aback to see me. He glanced again at the apartment number on the door, looked back at me, and said, "Excuse me, I'm looking for Miss Diane Wilson."

"Yes, of course," I said. "Do come in."

He gazed past me uncertainly, hesitating on the doorstep, saying, "Is she in?"

"I'm Diane Wilson," I said.

He blinked. "You're Diane Wilson?"

"Yes, I am."

"The Diane Wilson who worked for Mr. Edward Cunningham?"

"Yes, indeed." I made a sad

face. "Such a tragic thing," I said. "He was the sweetest man in the world, Mr. Cunningham was."

He cleared his throat, and I could see him struggling to regain his composure. "I see," he said. "Well, uh—well, Miss Wilson, my name is Fraser, Kenneth Fraser. I represent Transcontinental Insurance Association."

"Oh, no," I said. "I have all the insurance I need, thank you."

"No, no," he said. "I beg your pardon, I'm not here to sell insurance. I'm an investigator of the company."

"Oh, they all say that," I said, "and then when they get inside they *do* want to sell something. I remember one young man from an encyclopedia company—he swore up and down he was just taking a survey, and he no sooner—"

"Miss Wilson," Fraser said determinedly, "I am *definitely* not a salesman. I am not here to

discuss your insurance with you, I am here to discuss Mr. Cunningham's insurance."

"Oh, I wouldn't know anything about that," I said. "I simply handled the paperwork in Mr. Cunningham's real estate office. His private affairs he took care of himself."

"Miss Wilson, I—" He stopped, and looked up and down the hallway. "Do we have to speak out here?" he asked.

"Well, I don't know that there's anything for us to talk about," I said. I admit I was enjoying this.

"Miss Wilson, there is something for us to talk about." He put down the brief case and took out his wallet. "Here," he said. "Here's my identification."

I looked at the laminated card. It was very official and very complex and included Fraser's photograph, looking open-mouthed and stupid.

Fraser said, "I will *not* try to sell you insurance, nor will I ask you any details about Mr. Cunningham's handling of his private business affairs. That's a promise. Now, *may* I come in?"

It seemed time to stop playing games with him; after all, I didn't want him getting mad at me. He might go poking around too far, just out of spite. So I stepped back and said, "Very well then, young

man, you may come in. But I'll hold you to that promise."

We went into the living room and I motioned at the sofa, saying, "Do sit down."

"Thank you." But he didn't seem to like the sofa when he sat on it, possibly because of the clear plastic cover it had over it.

"My nieces come by from time to time," I said. "That's why I have those plastic covers on all the furniture. You know how children can be."

"Of course," he said. He looked around, and I think the entire living room depressed him, not just the plastic cover on the sofa.

Well, it was understandable. The living room was a natural consequence of Miss Diane Wilson's personality, with its plastic slipcovers, the doilies on all the tiny tables, the little plants in ceramic frogs, the windows with venetian blinds and curtains and drapes, the general air of overcrowded neatness. Something like the house Mrs. Muskrat has in all those children's stories.

I pretended not to notice his discomfort. I sat down on the chair that matched the sofa, adjusted my apron and skirt over my knees and said, "Very well, Mr. Fraser. I'm ready to listen."

He opened his brief case on

his lap, looked at me over it, and said, "This may come as something of a shock to you, Miss Wilson. I don't know if you were aware of the extent of Mr. Cunningham's policy holdings with us."

"I already told you, Mr. Fraser, that I—"

"Yes, of course," he said hastily. "I wasn't asking, I was getting ready to tell you myself. Mr. Cunningham had three policies with us of various types, all of which automatically became due when he died."

"Bless his memory," I said.

"Yes. Naturally. At any rate, the total on these three policies comes to one hundred twenty-five thousand dollars."

"Gracious!"

"With double indemnity for accidental death, of course," he went on, "the total payable is two hundred fifty thousand dollars. That is, one quarter of a million dollars."

"Dear me!" I said. "I would never have guessed."

Fraser looked carefully at me. "And you are the sole beneficiary," he said.

I smiled blankly at him, as though waiting for him to go on, then permitted my expression to show that the import of his words was gradually coming home to me. Slowly I sank back into the chair. My hand went to my throat, to the bit of lace

around the collar of my dress.

"Me?" I whispered. "Oh, Mr. Fraser, you must be joking!"

"Not a bit," he said. "Mr. Cunningham changed his beneficiary just one month ago, switching from his wife to you."

"I can't believe it," I whispered.

"Nevertheless, it is true. And since Mr. Cunningham did die an accidental death, burning up in his real estate office, and since such a large amount of money was involved, the routine is to send an investigator around, just to be sure everything's all right."

"Oh," I said. I was allowing myself to recover. I said, "That's why you were so surprised when you saw me."

He smiled sheepishly. "Frankly," he said, "yes."

"You had expected to find some sexy young thing, didn't you? Someone Mr. Cunningham had been having an—a relationship with."

"The thought had crossed my mind," he said, and made a boyish smile. "I do apologize," he said.

"Accepted," I said, and smiled back at him.

It was beautiful. He had come here with a strong preconception, and a belief based on that preconception that something was wrong.

Knock the preconception away and he would be left with an embarrassed feeling of having made a fool of himself. From now on he would want nothing more than to be rid of this case, since it would serve only to remind him of his wrong guess and the foolish way he'd acted when I'd first opened the door.

As I had supposed he would, he began at once to speed things up, taking a pad and pen from his brief case and saying, "Mr. Cunningham never told you he'd made you his beneficiary?"

"Oh, dear me, no. I only worked for the man three months."

"Yes, I know," he said. "It did seem odd to us."

"Oh, his poor wife," I said. "She may have neglected him but—"

"Neglected?"

"Well." I allowed myself this time to show a pretty confusion. "I shouldn't say anything against the woman," I went on. "I've never so much as laid eyes on her. But I do know that not once in the three months I worked there did she ever come in to see Mr. Cunningham, or even call him on the phone. Also, from some things he said—"

"What things, Miss Wilson?"

"I'd rather not say, Mr. Fraser. I don't know the

woman, and Mr. Cunningham is dead. I don't believe we should sit here and talk about them behind their backs."

"Still, Miss Wilson, he did leave his insurance money to you."

"He was always the sweetest man," I said. "Just the sweetest man in the world. But why he would—" I spread my hands, to show bewilderment.

Fraser said, "Do you suppose he had a fight with his wife? Such a bad one that he decided to change his beneficiary, looked around for somebody else, saw you, and that was that?"

"He was always very good to me," I said. "In the short time I knew him I always found Mr. Cunningham a perfect gentleman and the most considerate of men."

"I'm sure you did," he said. He looked at the notes he'd been taking, and muttered to himself. "Well, that might explain it. It's nutty, but—" He shrugged.

Yes, of course he shrugged. Kick away the preconception, leave him drifting and bewildered for just a second, and then quickly suggest another hypothesis to him. He clutched at it like a drowning man. Mr. Cunningham had had a big fight with Mrs. Cunningham. Mr. Cunningham had changed his

beneficiary out of hate or revenge, and had chosen Miss Diane Wilson, the dear middle-aged lady he'd recently hired as his secretary. As Mr. Fraser had so succinctly phrased it, it was nutty, but—

I said, "Well, I really don't know what to say. To tell the truth, Mr. Fraser, I'm overcome."

"That's understandable," he said. "A quarter of a million dollars doesn't come along every day."

"It isn't the amount," I said. "It's how it came to me. I have never been rich, Mr. Fraser, and because I never married I have always had to support myself. But I am a good secretary, a willing worker, and I have always handled my finances, if I say so myself, with wisdom and economy. A quarter of a million dollars is, as you say, a great deal of money, but I do not need a great deal of money. I would much rather have that sweet man Mr. Cunningham alive again than have all the money in the world."

"Of course," he nodded, and I could see he believed every word I had said.

I went further. "And particularly," I said, "to be given money that should certainly have gone to his wife. I just wouldn't have believed Mr. Cunningham capable of such a

hateful or vindictive action."

"He probably would have changed it back later on," Fraser said. "After he had cooled down. He only made the change three weeks before—before he passed on."

"Bless his soul," I said.

"There's one final matter, Miss Wilson," he said, "and then I'll leave you alone."

"Anything at all, Mr. Fraser," I said.

"About Mr. Roche," he said. "Mr. Cunningham's former partner. He seems to have moved from his old address, and we can't find him. Would you have his current address?"

"Oh, no," I said. "Mr. Roche left the concern before I was hired. In fact, Mr. Cunningham hired me because, after Mr. Roche left, it was necessary to have a secretary in order to be sure there was always someone in the office."

"I see," he said. "Well—" He put the pad and pen back into the brief case and started to his feet, just as the doorbell rang.

"Excuse me," I said. I went out to the hallway and opened the door.

She came boiling in like a hurricane, pushing past me and shouting, "Where is she? Where is the hussy?"

I followed her into the living room, where Fraser was standing and gaping at her in some

astonishment as she continued to shout and to demand to know where *she* was.

I said, "Madame, please. This happens to be my home."

"Oh, does it?" She stood in front of me, hands on hips. "Well, then, you can tell me where I'll find the Wilson woman."

"Who?"

"Diane Wilson, the little tramp. I want to—"

I said, "I am Diane Wilson."

She stood there, open-mouthed, gaping at me.

Fraser came over then, smiling a bit, saying, "Excuse me, Miss Wilson, I think I know what's happened." He turned to the new visitor and said, "You're Mrs. Cunningham, aren't you?"

Still open-mouthed, she managed to nod her head.

Fraser identified himself, and said, "I made the same mistake you did—I came here expecting to find some vamp. But as you can see—"

"Oh, I *am* sorry," Mrs. Cunningham said to me. She was a striking woman in her late thirties. "I called the insurance company, and when they told me Ed had changed all his policies over to you, I naturally thought—well—you know."

"Oh, dear," I said. "I certainly hope you don't think—"

"Oh, not at all," Mrs. Cunningham said, and smiled a bit, and patted my hand. "I wouldn't think that of *you*," she said.

Fraser said, "Mrs. Cunningham, didn't your husband tell you he was changing the beneficiary?"

"He certainly didn't," she said with sudden anger. "And neither did that company of yours. They should have told me the minute Ed made that change."

Fraser developed an icy chill. "Madame," he said, "a client has the right to make anyone he chooses his beneficiary, and the company is under no obligation to inform anyone that—"

"Oh, that's all right," I said. "I don't need the money. I'm perfectly willing to share it with Mrs. Cunningham."

Fraser snapped around to me, saying, "Miss Wilson, you aren't under any obligation at all to this woman. The money is legally and rightfully yours." As planned, he was now 100 per cent on my side.

Now it was time to make him think more kindly of Mrs. Cunningham. I said, "But this poor woman has been treated shabbily, Mr. Fraser. Absolutely shabbily. She was married to Mr. Cunningham for—how many years?"

"Twelve," she said, "twelve

years," and abruptly sat down on the sofa and began to sob.

"There, there," I said.

"What am I going to *do*?" she wailed. "I have no money, nothing! He left me nothing but debts! I can't even afford a decent burial for him!"

"We'll work it out," I assured her. "Don't you worry, we'll work it out." I looked at Fraser and said, "How long will it take to get the money?"

He said, "Well, we didn't discuss whether you want it in installments or in a lump sum. Monthly payments are usual—"

"Oh, a lump sum," I said. "There's so much to do right away, and then my older brother is a banker in California. *He'll* know what to do."

"If you're sure—" He was looking at Mrs. Cunningham, and didn't yet entirely trust her.

I said, "Oh, I'm sure this poor woman won't try to cheat me, Mr. Fraser."

Mrs. Cunningham cried, "Oh, God!" and wailed into her handkerchief.

"Besides," I said, "I'll phone my brother and have him fly east at once. He can handle everything for me."

"I suppose," he said, "if we expedite things, we could have your money for you in a few days."

"I'll have my brother call you," I said.

"Fine," he said. He hesitated, holding his brief case. "Mrs. Cunningham, are you coming along? Is there anywhere I can drop you?"

"Let the woman rest here a while," I said. "I'll make her some tea."

"Very well."

He left reluctantly. I walked him to the front door, where he said to me, quietly, "Miss Wilson, do me a favor."

"Of course, Mr. Fraser."

"Promise me you won't sign anything until your brother gets here to advise you."

"I promise," I said, sighing.

"Well," he said, "one more item and I'm done."

"Mr. Roche, you mean?"

"Right. I'll talk to him, if I can find him. Not that it's necessary." He smiled and said goodbye and walked away down the hall.

I closed the door, feeling glad he didn't think it necessary to talk to Roche. He would have found it somewhat difficult to talk to Roche, since Roche was in the process of being buried under the name of Edward Cunningham, his charred remains in the burned-out real estate office having been identified under that name by Mrs. Edward Cunningham.

Would Roche have actually

pushed that charge of embezzlement he'd been shouting about?

Well, the question was academic now, though three months ago it had seemed real enough to cause me to strangle the life out of him, real enough to cause me to set up this hasty and desperate—but, I think, rather ingenious—plan for getting myself out of the whole mess entirely. The only question had been whether or not our deep-freeze would preserve the body sufficiently over the three months of preparation, but the fire had settled that problem too.

I went back into the living room. She got up from the sofa and said, "What's all this jazz about a brother in California?"

"Change of plans," I said. "I was too much the innocent, and you were too much the wronged woman. Without a brother, Fraser might have insisted on hanging around, helping me with the finances himself. And the *other* Miss

Wilson is due back from Greece in two weeks."

"That's all well and good, Ed," my wife said. "But where is this brother going to come from? She doesn't have one, you know—the real Miss Wilson, I mean."

"I know." That had been one of the major reasons I'd hired Miss Wilson in the first place—aside from our general similarity of build—the fact that she *had* no relatives, making it absolutely safe to take over her apartment during my impersonation.

My wife said, "Well? What are you going to do for a brother?"

I took off the gray wig and scratched my head, feeling great relief. "I'll be the brother," I said. "A startling family resemblance between us."

She shook her head, grinning at me. "You are a one, Ed," she said. "You sure are a one."

"That's me," I said. "The sweetest man in the world."



Robert Somerlott

Do Your Christmas Shoplifting Early

Meet Mrs. Whistler, a retired actress who once played Whistler's mother. And what do you think the old gal looks like now? Can't you guess? Well, imagine a little old lady with a kind and sublimely patient expression—truly a sad-sweet face; naturally, she wears a dark dress with a white round collar and lace cuffs. But under the gentle grandmotherly exterior, behind the sad-sweet smile, you will find a 'tec tigress, a crusading avenger of cruelty and injustice

Shortly after Mrs. Whistler triggered pound reform laws in retired from the stage, she (that state.) discovered her true genius for Johnny was also the only escapades bordering on crime, one to know every detail of. But with modesty astounding in how Mrs. Whistler brought the an actress, she has always powerful MacTavish Depart- managed to stay in the ment Store of Los Angeles to background. No one—except its knees in less than 24 hours. her son, Johnny Creighton—has. There exists no court transcript, ever suspected that Mrs. and the only memento of this Whistler was the secret force case is an unflattering mug shot behind several headline events of Mrs. Whistler taken at the that startled the country in the Los Angeles jail. Despite the last few years. atrocious lighting, Mrs. Whistler

For instance, millions of looks exactly as she did in her newspaper readers are aware farewell performance on Broad- that 267 animals staged a mass way as the artist's mother in breakout from the St. Louis Arrangement in Gray, a role she pound on Thanksgiving Day, became so identified with that 1959. Only Johnny Creighton she legally adopted the name of knows that Mrs. Whistler the character. In the photo she engineered the escape. (The wears a dark dress; her white, incident, headlined by newspa- round collar is visible, but her- pers as "Dog Days in Missouri," lace cuffs are not. Her sweet

expression of sublime patience was not marred by the ordeal she was suffering—an ordeal for which others would soon pay heavily.

Mrs. Whistler had no intention of getting involved in "The Affair of the Capricorn Brooch." When she descended, unannounced, from the smoggy skies of Southern California on Friday, December 18, it was for the innocent purpose of spending the Christmas holiday with Johnny.

Still, the moment he heard her voice on the phone he had a premonition of trouble. Oddly enough, he was thinking about his mother when her call came through. He had been sitting in his two-by-four law office, daydreaming of pretty Joyce Gifford, who had almost, but not quite, agreed to marry him. How, he wondered, could he explain his mother to Joyce? Just then the phone rang.

"Johnny, dear," said a gentle voice. "Surprise! It's Mother."

"Mother?" His first reaction was panic. "Where are you? What have you done?"

"I'm at the airport. I've come for Christmas."

"Don't make a move till I get there. And, Mother," he pleaded, "don't *do* anything!"

"Whatever do you mean, dear?" Mrs. Whistler was faintly reproachful.

As he battled through the freeway traffic, Johnny could not rid himself of the suspicion that his mother was up to something. But at the airport, and later in his apartment, her manner was so subdued that Johnny was totally unprepared for the events that followed. She's getting old, he thought, she's settling down at last. The idea brought relief—and a little sadness.

At 6:30 Joyce Gifford, her usually calm face white with anger, knocked at Johnny's door.

Johnny greeted her with a quick hug. "Hi, darling. Merry Christmas!" He lowered his voice. "I want you to meet my mother. She just arrived from New York."

In the living room an elderly lady was seated on the couch. Vainly, Joyce tried to remember where she'd seen her before—there was something hauntingly familiar about the black dress, the folded hands, the sad-sweet face.

"How do you do?" said the old lady. "I'm Mrs. Whistler." Joyce nearly dropped her purse. "You're upset, my dear," she said. "I could tell the moment you came in."

"Does it show that much? I've—I've had a horrible day!"

"Good Lord," said Johnny, "what's the matter?"

"Tomorrow I'm quitting my job at MacTavish's. Mr. Schlag can find himself a new secretary—if anybody alive can stand him! It was the most terrible scene! All over this poor pathetic woman they caught shoplifting."

"Shoplifting?" Mrs. Whistler leaned forward. "Isn't that interesting!"

Johnny saw the intent expression on his mother's face. A danger signal flashed through him and he tried to interrupt. But it was too late.

"I just can't tell you how horrible the whole thing was," said Joyce.

"Try, my dear," said Mrs. Whistler gently. "Try."

During the first 33 years of its existence, MacTavish's ("A Wee Penny Saved Is a Big Penny Earned") had dealt with petty shoplifters in a routine way: first offenders were usually dismissed with threats of embarrassment. Otherwise respectable kleptomaniacs were delivered to their humiliated relatives. Suspected professionals were prosecuted relentlessly.

Then Dudley P. Schlag, nephew of a large stockholder, became Manager, and things changed.

"Once a thief always a thief!" he declared, beating his

bony little fist on the desktop. He assumed personal charge of Store Security and would neglect any other duty for the pleasure of watching a terrified teen-ager squirm under his merciless, watery eye.

"There are no extenuating circumstances at MacTavish's!" By political influence and exaggerated statistics he induced several local judges to cooperate in his crusade and after each arrest Schlag called the newspapers to make sure the suspect was well publicized.

"He's inhuman!" said Joyce Gifford, close to tears. "Of course, thieves should go to jail. But two weeks ago there was a teen-age girl—really a nice kid—who took a little piece of costume jewelry on a high school dare. Mr. Schlag went to Juvenile Court himself and swore he'd seen her around the store several times—that this wasn't really her first theft. And I'm sure that wasn't true! A month ago they caught this old woman, a doctor's wife. She's been taking little things for years and her husband always pays for them. She's really pathetic. And Mr. Schlag had her taken to jail!"

Mrs. Whistler clucked sympathetically. "The quality of mercy is not strained," she said.

"Today Miss Vought—she's the meanest store detective—

dragged in a woman who tried to take a cotton sweater from Infants' Wear. Her name is Mrs. Blainey. She has an invalid husband, and she's trying to support him and four children by doing domestic work. I just know she'd never stolen anything before. When Miss Vought searched her purse it was enough to make you cry. She had exactly forty-three cents. There was an unpaid gas bill and a notice that a mortgage payment on their house was overdue."

"What happened to her?" asked Mrs. Whistler.

"Mr. Schlag told her that if she'd sign a confession the store wouldn't prosecute. Well, she signed it, crying. Then he called the police. She's in jail right now—at Christmas time! Her case comes up Monday—"

"And they'll throw the book at her," said Johnny slowly.

Joyce nodded. "Oh, that Mr. Schlag! There just isn't anything bad enough that could happen to him!"

Mrs. Whistler smiled slightly. "Oh, I'm sure there is, my dear!"

Joyce turned to Johnny. "You're a lawyer. What can be done about it?"

"Nothing."

"But, Johnny," she protested, "surely you can do something!"

"I don't see what. I suppose I could appear in court for her on Monday. But it wouldn't do any good. The sentencing is going to be routine. You'd just better forget the whole thing, Joyce."

"Forget it? I can't forget it!"

"Someone," said Mrs. Whistler, "should take action."

"They certainly should," agreed Joyce.

Johnny was suddenly aware that both women were staring at him expectantly. There was a dreadful silence in the room. He had never seen Joyce so angry or so determined.

"Hold on, you two! What can I do about it? I'm just a guy who draws wills and sets up escrows. There just isn't any use in getting mixed up in something that can't—" Johnny's voice trailed off when he saw the expression on Joyce's face.

Mrs. Whistler glanced at the tiny watch pinned to her dress. "My goodness! If you young people will excuse me—" She took a step toward the guest room.

Johnny saw the gleam in her eye. He was on his feet in an instant. "Mother! You're planning something!"

Mrs. Whistler smiled at Joyce. "Johnny's always so worried about me. Isn't that sweet? Good night, dears." Mrs.

Whistler closed her door behind her.

Johnny turned to Joyce accusingly. "You've set her off! I can tell by the look in her eye!"

"What on earth do you mean?"

"You don't know her!" Johnny paced the floor. "Last year she took on Mr. Moses and the whole New York Park Department—singlehanded! Six months ago it was Internal Revenue!"

"Johnny Creighton, stop shouting at me! It isn't my fault."

"Oh, yes it is! You got her started with this Mrs. Blainey story. It's made to order for her—invalid husband, four kids, even an overdue mortgage payment! It's right out of Charles Dickens. And tomorrow, you can bet, she'll try to do something to MacTavish's!"

Joyce stood up quickly. "Well, I'm glad somebody in your family has a little spunk! If she can teach MacTavish's a lesson, more power to her!" Joyce looked at him coldly. "Johnny Creighton, you're a stick-in-the-mud! So cautious it's plain dull! You're supposed to be an attorney, but—"

"What do you want? Perry Mason?"

Joyce gave him her coolest secretarial smile. "Perry Mason

is a very attractive guy. Good night, Johnny!"

"Stick-in-the-mud!" he repeated softly. Slowly a grim expression came over Johnny's pleasant face. "Mother," he called. "Are you awake?"

Mrs. Whistler's door opened instantly. "Yes, dear."

Johnny's voice was stiff with determination. "We've got some planning to do."

"Planning?" Mrs. Whistler blinked at him. "Oh, darling, I've already done *that*."

At six o'clock Saturday morning Mrs. Whistler bounced out of bed. Three times she stretched, bent, pressed her palms flat on the floor. Thirty minutes later she stood over the stove, dreamily preparing scrambled eggs for Johnny while she examined a full page ad that pictured items on sale at MacTavish's. Her son, still in pajamas, sat at the breakfast bar, his face a mask of stony heroism. He was convinced his mother's fantastic scheme would fail, but he was determined to go down fighting.

Mrs. Whistler pointed to a small item in the MacTavish ad. "One of these would do nicely," she said. Johnny looked doubtful, but nodded bravely. "If we can only think of some way to handle the last

part!" Suddenly Mrs. Whistler smiled happily. "Santa Claus!" she exclaimed. "You'll be Santa Claus!"

"Mother! No!"

"Johnny, dear!" Mrs. Whistler's tone was stern. "Please don't be stubborn."

"I'll go along with the rest of it, but I won't be Santa Claus!"

Mrs. Whistler sighed. "Very well, darling." She stirred the eggs thoughtfully. "Now, we'll rent a nice red suit, and with whiskers no one will recognize you, and—"

Johnny groaned and surrendered.

At 8:15, as Joyce Gifford was leaving for her last day at MacTavish's, her telephone rang.

"Good morning, Joyce, dear. This is Mrs. Whistler."

"Why, good morning."

"Joyce, I have a dreadful premonition that disaster is about to overtake poor Mr. Schlag. If you happen to see me later today—and you will—please don't recognize me."

"I don't understand."

"Don't try, dear. Just don't recognize me. Or Johnny, either."

"Johnny? You don't mean that Johnny's actually going to—"

Mrs. Whistler chuckled. "Still waters run deep. Good-

bye, my dear. See you later."

At the height of the noon rush hour, Traffic Officer "Spud" Battersby trembled in the middle of a terrifying intersection, blowing a whistle, waving his arms, and narrowly avoiding death at every second. Suddenly Officer Battersby's whistle nearly fell out of his mouth. A prim, elderly lady carrying a straw shopping bag was calmly coming toward him, oblivious of the screaming brakes and blaring horns.

"My God!" he shouted. "Get back! You'll be run over!"

A truck screeched to a halt six inches from the old lady. "Officer," she said, "I want to report a crime."

Battersby snatched her from the path of an oncoming cab. They huddled in the middle of the street. "You want to be killed?"

"Killed? Oh, no. No one's been killed. But my purse was snatched not ten minutes ago."

"Get out of here! Call the police station!" A red light changed and a wheeled onslaught avalanched by.

"My," said the old lady, "you are busy, aren't you?" She gave him a slip of paper. "If my purse is found, here's my name and phone number."

"Lady, please . . . Look out for that truck!"

"Merry Christmas, Officer!" Battersby shoved the paper into his pocket and managed to halt a hundred racing vehicles while the old lady made her unhurried way to the curb.

"Another nut!" he said. "A one-hundred per cent Los Angeles nut!"

At 12:45 Mrs. Whistler hesitated at the costume jewelry counter in MacTavish's, smiling at Miss Hefron, the harassed and yule-weary salesgirl. "Everything's lovely! I simply have to see every piece!"

Dear Lord, no! Miss Hefron thought. "Our pleasure, Ma'am," she said brightly.

"Look at all these pretty things!" A velvet-lined tray stood open on the counter.

"They're horoscope brooches, Ma'am. An advertised special. We still have Virgo and Capricorn and—"

"Capricorn? Of course! I bought one of those for—"

Mrs. Whistler stopped speaking. Her eyes rolled wildly as she grasped the counter for support. With a crash the tray of costume jewelry fell to the floor, and Mrs. Whistler collapsed on top of it. Before Miss Hefron could reach the stricken customer, Mrs. Whistler had miraculously recovered. Struggling to her feet, she replaced the tray awkwardly.

Mrs. Whistler's eyelids fluttered. "I've just been on my feet too long—a little dizzy spell. No more shopping today!"

Slowly Mrs. Whistler made her way toward the doors of the store, clutching her straw shopping bag firmly. For a dreadful moment she believed nothing was going to happen to her; then her spirits soared as a strong hand gripped her elbow. An ash-blond woman with a flashing gold tooth was beside her.

"Let's just step right up to the mezzanine office, honey."

Mrs. Whistler seemed bewildered. "Pardon? I can't look at anything else today."

The steely grip of the woman's talons tightened. "Step along, honey, d'ya hear? We'll straighten this out and everything will be hunky-dory."

Mrs. Whistler felt herself propelled toward a service elevator, whisked upstairs, and forcibly ushered into an austere office.

"Sit down, honey," said the woman. "I'm Miss Vought, Store Security. I didn't catch your name."

"No," said Mrs. Whistler. "You didn't."

Miss Vought flipped the switch of an intercom. "Miss Gifford, this is Vought. Tell Mr. Schlag I've landed a real pro."

Miss Vought rested her thin hips on the edge of the desk and inserted a cigarette between her raspberry lips. "Relax, honey. You'll sign a little statement and breeze out of here in no time."

"I don't understand."

Miss Vought laughed unpleasantly. "You're fabulous, honey. Just fabulous. That get-up you're wearing would fool anybody."

Dudley P. Schlag, drawn up to his full five feet one, strutted into the office, his pointed lapels bristling. Joyce Gifford, notebook in hand, followed. He did not see the astonished look that flashed across his secretary's face.

"We got the cool goods," Miss Vought told him. She rummaged in Mrs. Whistler's shopping bag and brought forth a Capricorn brooch set with tiny rhinestones. "Counter Eighteen. Pulled the old fainting act, glammed this. I had my eye on her for twenty minutes. She cased perfume first, then checked out novelties, finally wound up in jewelry."

"Kindly put down my brooch, young lady," said Mrs. Whistler, sweetly but firmly. "You might drop it."

"You're fabulous, honey," said Miss Vought, "fabulous."

"Name and address?" said Mr. Schlag.

"I live in New York. I'm Mrs. Whistler."

"Occupation?"

"I," said Mrs. Whistler, "am a Senior Citizen."

"All right, Grandma," said Schlag. "What about the brooch?"

"I bought it this morning. I don't remember the name of the store. I don't know your city very well."

"Where's the sales slip?"

"Of course!" Mrs. Whistler smiled brightly. "The name will be on the sales slip, and I'm careful about saving them." Then her face clouded. She seemed near tears. "But it was in my purse. And someone stole my purse just an hour or so ago."

"Tragic," said Schlag.

"I reported it to the police, of course."

Mr. Schlag spoke into the intercom. "Mrs. Luden, call police headquarters and ask if a stolen purse was reported by a . . . Mrs. Whistler." He smiled thinly.

"It won't wash, honey," said Miss Vought. "There were six Capricorn brooches when you staged your tumble at Counter Eighteen. But only five when you left."

"You double-checked?" asked Schlag.

"Sure. While she was ankling for the door."

Thoughtfully Schlag cracked his knuckles, then spun violently on Mrs. Whistler. "Those brooches were a plant, Grandma," he said. "That's why they were on the open counter."

"Gracious," said Mrs. Whistler. "You mean you were deliberately tempting people? Why, that's wicked!"

"My secretary will type out a little statement," he said, "saying you admit taking the brooch. You'll sign it, and then you can leave."

"Dear me," said Mrs. Whistler. "I almost believe you are accusing me of *stealing*. Why, I can't sign anything. It would be a lie." She stood up abruptly, snatching the brooch from Miss Vought. "Good afternoon," said Mrs. Whistler, taking a step toward the door.

Miss Vought and Schlag swooped like hawks, seizing her. "No, you don't, sister!" Miss Vought pried the brooch from Mrs. Whistler's fingers. "That's evidence!"

"You're under arrest!" shouted Schlag, then howled in pain as Mrs. Whistler's teeth sank into his hand.

Joyce Gifford sat in paralyzed shock, unable to move.

"The cooler for you, honey!" cried Miss Vought, restraining Mrs. Whistler with a hammerlock. "We've got the goods to fry you, and we'll see

that they throw away the key!"

In less than an hour Mrs. Whistler had been booked, mugged, and fingerprinted.

At 2:15 P.M. a nervous, bedraggled Santa Claus elbowed through the crowded first floor aisles of MacTavish's. Like the Pied Piper, he acquired pursuing children at every step. "A bike!" "A beach ball!" "A 'rector set!"

For a moment he leaned against Counter 18, warding off his tormentors. "Oh, Lord," he whispered hoarsely to Miss Hefron. "What a hell of a way to make a living!"

"Aren't you on the fourth floor?" she asked.

"Coffee break," Santa groaned. His closed hand rested near the tray of horoscope brooches. A customer called to Miss Hefron and she turned away. Only for a moment—

At 4:25 P.M. Mr. Schlag glared across his desk at a resolute young man who returned his hostile look unflinchingly. "I, sir, am John R. Creighton, attorney-at-law." A business card was slammed onto the desk. "You, sir, are being sued for \$500,000!"

"I beg your pardon?" the young attorney's piercing eyes were utterly unnerving. Mr. Schlag's mouth felt dry.

"My client," continued John Creighton, "a distinguished American actress, is suffering torment in the Los Angeles jail on trumped-up charges of shoplifting. You, sir, are responsible for this malicious accusation." The attorney's voice grew hollow. "May the Lord pity you, Mr. Schlag, for the courts never will!"

Schlag's confidence returned. He spoke quickly into the intercom. "Send Miss Vought up, please. And come in yourself, Miss Gifford—with your notebook." He turned back to the lawyer. "You're wasting your time, Mr. Creighton. This is clear-cut theft, and we'll prosecute to the fullest."

"Take notes, Miss Gifford," snapped Schlag.

"Yes, sir." Joyce glanced at Johnny without batting an eyelash.

Five minutes later Schlag was summing up the evidence. "The brooches were counted. Only five remained. Then your client, this Mrs. Whistler—" he smirked at the name "—told a preposterous tale about a stolen purse with a sales slip from some imaginary store. We checked with the police and caught her flat-footed in her lie."

"I see," said Johnny slowly. "Who would have believed it?"

Joyce looked anxiously at

Johnny. He looked humble and defeated as her eyes pleaded with him to do something.

At last he spoke. "Maybe we could check the brooches one more time?"

"Certainly." The four marched downstairs to Counter 18, Joyce tagging behind in despair. "Miss Hefron," said Schlag, "has the number of brooches on this tray changed since our incident with the thief?"

Johnny Creighton stared at the glittering jewelry. "The tray was knocked over," he said softly. "I wonder... Would you please pick up the tray? There's just a chance—"

Joyce lifted the tray from the counter. A Capricorn brooch, its clasp open, fell to the floor with a twinkle of light. "Under the tray!" exclaimed Johnny. "Who would have believed it!"

Miss Hefron was wide-eyed. "When they spilled! One got caught in the velvet underneath!"

Johnny's tone was ominous. "I count six brooches, Mr. Schlag. Shall we return to your office?"

On the mezzanine steps Schlag hesitated, then raced on toward the door marked Manager. A moment later he was shouting into the phone. "You've already gone to press?"

But I only gave you that shoplifter story a couple of hours ago! You can't kill it?"

He hung up quickly as Johnny entered the office, followed by a smiling Joyce Gifford and a tense Miss Vought.

Taking the phone, Johnny dialed a number. "Police Headquarters? Missing Property, please... Yes, I'm calling about a black leather purse with identification for a Mrs. Whistler... Oh, it's been turned in? Fine!"

Johnny smiled at the store manager. "It was turned in an hour ago. By a child—a mere street urchin. A touching development, I think."

"Lemme talk to them!" Schlag snatched the phone. "That purse—is there a store sales slip in it?" During the moment's pause the receiver trembled against Schlag's ash-colored ear. "Yes? From Teague's? For \$8.85?" His voice sank to a hopeless whisper. "Officer, at the bottom of that slip has a special tax been added... like for jewelry?"

Fifteen seconds later the phone was in its cradle and Dudley P. Schlag had collapsed in his swivel chair.

Johnny Creighton spoke softly but menacingly. "No doubt you'll soon learn that

Mrs. Whistler reported the theft of her purse. Perhaps the officer didn't report to headquarters immediately. And I'm sure a clerk at Teague's will remember Mrs. Whistler's buying a brooch this morning. We are charging you with false arrest and imprisonment, slander, physical assault—"

"Assault? No one touched her!"

"You're lying!" Joyce Gifford slammed her notebook shut. "You both attacked her! I saw the whole brutal thing. You twisted her arm until she screamed and Mr. Schlag tried to kick her. It's a wonder the poor old lady isn't dead!" She stepped close to Johnny. "And I'll swear to that, Mr... is it Leighton?"

At 6:10 four people sat in Schlag's office. Joyce Gifford was not present. She had left MacTavish's, never to return. Next to the store manager was Walter Matson, legal counsel for MacTavish's. Johnny Creighton was seated beside Mrs. Whistler whose hands were folded in her lap. A faraway look on her sweet face revealed signs of recent suffering.

Johnny was concluding his remarks. "On Monday we will sue for \$500,000. Mrs. Whistler will be an appealing plaintiff, don't you think?"

"Five hundred thousand!" thing consoles me. Money—lots of it. \$500,000 of it."

"Relax, Dudley," said the lawyer. "You've had it."

"I agree." Mrs. Whistler put gentle hand on Johnny's arm. Let's end this unpleasantness without a lot of fuss. I'll drop this whole thing in exchange for a few little favors. I've been through a shocking experience. And I hate to say it, but it's entirely your fault, Mr. Schlag.

I expect MacTavish's to pay me six thousand four hundred and eight dollars and eighty-five cents. Also, I met a charming woman today—in jail, of all places. Her name is Mrs. Blainey, and—"

"A shoplifter!" Schlag interrupted. "We've got a confession."

"You could drop the charges," said Mrs. Whistler. "I just couldn't be happy knowing he was in prison." Mrs. Whistler smiled brightly. "And when I'm unhappy, only one

Joyce met them at the door of the apartment. She threw her arms first around Mrs. Whistler, then around Johnny. "You were just wonderful," she said. "Johnny, I never saw you like that before!"

Johnny blushed modestly. "Routine," he said.

They celebrated in a small candlelit restaurant. Johnny raised his glass. "Merry Christmas for the Blainey family! Sixty-four hundred will pay off the mortgage on their house."

Mrs. Whistler nodded. "And I'm getting back the \$8.85 I spent for that dreadful brooch this morning." She frowned. "Oh, dear! I forgot about the rent for the Santa costume."

"What Santa costume?" Joyce asked. But Johnny quickly changed the subject.

Julian Symons

'Twixt the Cup and the Lip

Mr. Rossiter Payne, a dignified and respected London businessman, was a part-time dealer in rare books and manuscripts. The rest of the time he was an unsuspected and undetected jewel thief. This year he was planning to give himself a truly splendid Christmas present—the mastermind's share of the value of the Russian Royal Family Jewels. And, as before in his successful criminal career, he planned the coup with a professional's eye for every detail, especially the vital element of synchronization. So nothing, of course, could possibly go wrong—Mr. Rossiter Payne's plan was foolproof, minutely dovetailed and jigsawed... An absorbing novelet..

Criminal: ROSSITER PAYNE

66 **A** beautiful morning, Miss Oliphant. I shall take a short constitutional."

"Very well, Mr. Payne."

Mr. Rossiter Payne put on his good thick Melton overcoat, took his bowler hat off its peg, carefully brushed it, and put it on. He looked at himself in a small glass and nodded approvingly at what he saw.

He was a man in his early fifties, but he might have passed for ten years less, so square were his shoulders, so ruler-straight his back. Two fine wings of gray hair showed under the bowler. He looked

like a retired Guards officer although he had, in fact, a closer relationship with the Army than an uncle who had been cashiered.

At the door he paused, eyes twinkling. "Don't anybody steal the stock while I'm out, Miss Oliphant."

Miss Oliphant, a thin spinster of indeterminate middle-age, blushed. She adored Mr. Payne.

He had removed his hat to speak to her. Now he clapped it on his head again, cast an appreciative look at the bay window of his shop, which displayed several sets of stail

ard authors with the discreet legend above—*Rossiter Payne, Bookseller. Specialist in First Editions and Manuscripts*—and made his way up New Bond Street toward Oxford Street.

At the top of New Bond Street he stopped, as he did five days a week, at the stall on the corner. The old woman put the carnation into his buttonhole.

"Fourteen shopping days to Christmas now, Mrs. Shankly. We've all got to think about it, haven't we?"

A ten shilling note changed hands instead of the usual half crown. He left her blessing him confusedly.

This was perfect December weather—crisply cold; the sun shining. Oxford Street was wearing its holiday decorations—enormous gold and silver coins from which depended ropes of pearls, diamonds, rubies, emeralds. When lighted up in the afternoon they looked pretty, although a little garish for Mr. Payne's refined taste. But still, they had a certain symbolic feeling about them, and he smiled at them.

Nothing, indeed, could disturb Mr. Payne's good temper this morning—not the jostling crowds on the pavements or the customary traffic jams which seemed, indeed, to please him. He walked along until he came to a large store that said above

it, in enormous letters, **ORBIN'S**. These letters were picked out in colored lights, and the lights themselves were festooned with Christmas trees and holly wreaths and the figures of the Seven Dwarfs, all of which lighted up.

Orbin's department store went right round the corner into the comparatively quiet Jessiter Street. Once again Mr. Payne went through a customary ceremony. He crossed the road and went down several steps into an establishment unique of its kind—Danny's Shoe Parlor. Here, sitting on a kind of throne in this semi-basement, one saw through a small window the lower halves of passers-by. Here Danny, with two assistants almost as old as himself, had been shining shoes for almost 30 years.

Leather-faced, immensely lined, but still remarkably sharp-eyed, Danny knelt down now in front of Mr. Payne, turned up the cuffs of his trousers, and began to put an altogether superior shine on already well-polished shoes.

"Lovely morning," Mr. Payne.

"You can't see much of it from here."

"More than you think. You see the pavements, and if they're not spotted, right off you know it isn't raining. Then

there's something in the way people walk, you know what I mean, like it's Christmas in the air." Mr. Payne laughed indulgently. Now Danny was mildly reproachful. "You still haven't brought me in that pair of black shoes, sir."

Mr. Payne frowned slightly. A week ago he had been almost knocked down by a bicyclist, and the mudguard of the bicycle had scraped badly one of the shoes he was wearing, cutting the leather at one point. Danny was confident that he could repair the cut so that it wouldn't show. Mr. Payne was not so sure.

"I'll bring them along," he said vaguely.

"Sooner the better, Mr. Payne, sooner the better."

Mr. Payne did not like being reminded of the bicycle incident. He gave Danny half a crown instead of the ten shillings he had intended, crossed the road again, and walked into the side entrance of Orbin's, which called itself unequivocally "London's Greatest Department Store."

This end of the store was quiet. He walked up the stairs, past the grocery department on the ground floor, and wine and cigars on the second, to jewelry on the third. There were rarely many people in this department, but today a small crowd

had gathered around a man who was making a speech. A placard at the department entrance said: "The Russian Royal Family Jewels. On display for two weeks by kind permission of the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess of Moldo-Lithuania."

These were not the Russian Crown Jewels, seized by the Bolsheviks during the Revolution, but an inferior collection brought out of Russia by the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess, who had long since become plain Mr. and Mrs. Skandorski, who lived in New Jersey, and were now on a visit to England.

Mr. Payne was not interested in Mr. and Mrs. Skandorski, nor in Sir Henry Orbin who was stumbling through a short speech. He was interested only in the jewels. When the speech was over he mingled with the crowd round the showcase that stood almost in the middle of the room.

The royal jewels lay on beds of velvet—a tiara that looked too heavy to be worn, diamond necklaces and bracelets, a cluster of diamonds and emeralds, and a dozen other pieces, each with an elegant calligraphic description of its origin and history. Mr. Payne did not see the jewels as a romantic relic of the past, nor did he permit himself to think of them as things of beauty. He

saw them as his personal Christmas present.

He walked out of the department, looking neither to left nor right, and certainly paying no attention to the spotty young clerk who rushed forward to open the door for him. He walked back to his bookshop, sniffing that sharp December air, made another little joke to Miss Oliphant, and told her she could go out to lunch. During her lunch hour he sold an American a set of a Victorian magazine called *The Jewel Box*.

It seemed a good augury.

In the past ten years Mr. Payne had engineered successfully—with the help of other, and inferior, intellects—six jewel robberies. He had remained undetected, he believed, partly because of his skill in planning, partly because he ran a perfectly legitimate book business, and partly because he broke the law only when he needed money. He had little interest in women, and his habits were generally ascetic, but he did have one vice.

Mr. Payne developed a system at roulette, an improvement on the almost infallible Frank-Konig system, and every year he went to Monte Carlo and played his system. Almost every year it failed—or rather, it revealed certain imperfections

which he then tried to remedy.

It was to support his foolproof system that Mr. Payne had turned from book-selling to crime. He believed himself to be, in a quiet way, a mastermind in the modern criminal world.

Those associated with him were far from that, as he immediately would have acknowledged. He met them two evenings after he had looked at the royal jewels, in his pleasant little flat above the shop, which could be approached from a side entrance opening into an alley.

There was Stacey, who looked what he was, a thick-nosed thug; there was a thin young man in a tight suit whose name was Jack Line, and who was always called Straight or Straight Line; and there was Lester Jones, the spotty clerk in the Jewelry Department.

Stacey and Straight Line sat drinking whiskey, Mr. Payne sipped some excellent sherry, and Lester Jones drank nothing at all, while Mr. Payne in his pedantic, almost schoolmasterly manner, told them how the robbery was to be accomplished.

"You all know what the job is, but let me tell you how much it is worth. In its present form the collection is worth whatever sum you'd care to

mention—a quarter of a million pounds, perhaps. There is no real market value. But alas, it will have to be broken up. My friend thinks the value will be in the neighborhood of fifty thousand pounds. Not less, and not much more."

"Your friend?" the jewelry clerk said timidly.

"The fence. Lambie, isn't it?" It was Stacey who spoke. Mr. Payne nodded. "Okay, how do we split?"

"I will come to that later. Now, here are the difficulties. First of all, there are two store detectives on each floor. We must see to it that those on the third floor are not in the Jewelry Department. Next, there is a man named Davidson, an American, whose job it is to keep an eye on the jewels. He has been brought over here by a protection agency, and it is likely that he will carry a gun. Third, the jewels are in a showcase, and any attempt to open this showcase other than with the proper key will set off an alarm. The key is kept in the Manager's Office, inside the Jewelry Department."

Stacey got up, shambling over to the whiskey decanter, and poured himself another drink. "Where do you get all this from?"

Mr. Payne permitted himself a small smile. "Lester works in

the department. Lester is a friend of mine."

Stacey looked at Lester with contempt. He did not like amateurs.

"Let me continue, and tell you how the obstacles can be overcome. First, the two store detectives. Supposing that a small fire bomb were planted in the Fur Department, at the other end of the third floor from Jewelry—that would certainly occupy one detective for a few minutes. Supposing that in the department that deals with ladies' hats, which is next to Furs, a woman shopper complained that she had been robbed—this would certainly involve the other store detective. Could you arrange this, Stace? These—assistants, shall I call them?—would be paid a straight fee. They would have to carry out their diversions at a precise time, which I have fixed as ten thirty in the morning."

"Okay," said Stacey. "Consider it arranged."

"Next, Davidson. He is an American, as I said, and Lester tells me that a happy event is expected in his family any day now. He has left Mrs. Davidson behind in America, of course. Now, supposing that a call came through, apparently from an American hospital, for Mr. Davidson. Supposing that the telephone in the Jewelry

Department was out of order because the cord had been cut. Davidson would be called out of the department for the few minutes, no more, that we should need."

"Who cuts the cord?" Stacey asked.

"That will be part of Lester's ob."

"And who makes the phone call?"

"Again, Stace, I hoped that you might be able to provide—"

"I can do that." Stacey drained his whiskey. "But what do you do?"

Mr. Payne's lips, never full, were compressed to a disappearing line. He answered the implied criticism only by inviting them to look at two maps—one the layout of the entire third floor, the other of the Jewelry Department itself. Stacey and Straight were impressed, as the uneducated always are, by such evidence of careful planning.

"The Jewelry Department is at one end of the third floor. It has only one exit—into the Carpet Department. There is a service lift which comes straight up into the Jewelry Department. You and I, Stace, will be in that. We shall stop it between floors with the Emergency Stop button. At exactly ten thirty-two we shall go up to the third floor. Lester will give us a sign.

If everything has gone well, we proceed. If not, we call the job off. Now, what I propose . . ."

He told them, they listened, and they found it good. Even the ignorant, Mr. Payne was glad to see, could recognize genius. He told Straight Line his role.

"We must have a car, Straight, and a driver. What he has to do is simple, but he must stay cool. So I thought of you." Straight grinned.

"In Jessiter Street, just outside the side entrance to Orbin's, there is a parking space reserved for Orbin's customers. It is hardly ever full. But if it is full you can double park there for five minutes—cars often do that. I take it you can—acquire a car, shall I say?—for the purpose. You will face away from Oxford Street, and you will have no more than a few minutes' run to Lambie's house on Greenly Street. You will drop Stace and me, drive on a mile or two, and leave the car. We shall give the stuff to Lambie. He will pay on the nail. Then we all split."

From that point they went on to argue about the split. The argument was warm, but not really heated. They settled that Stacey would get 25 per cent of the total, Straight and Lester 12½ per cent each, and that half would go to the master-

mind. Mr. Payne agreed to provide out of his share the £150 that Stacey said would cover the three diversions.

The job was fixed six days ahead—for Tuesday of the following week.

Stacey had two faults which had prevented him from rising high in his profession. One was that he drank too much, the other that he was stupid. He made an effort to keep his drinking under control, knowing that when he drank he talked. So he did not even tell his wife about the job, although she was safe enough.

But he could not resist cheating about the money, which Payne had given to him in full.

The fire bomb was easy. Stacey got hold of a little man named Shrimp Bateson, and fixed it with him. There was no risk, and Shrimp thought himself well paid with twenty-five quid. The bomb itself cost only a fiver, from a friend who dealt in hardware. It was guaranteed to cause just a little fire, nothing serious.

For the telephone call Stacey used a Canadian who was grubbing a living at a striptease club. It didn't seem to either of them that the job was worth more than a tenner, but the Canadian asked for

twenty and got fifteen.

The woman was a different matter, for she had to be a bit of an actress, and she might be in for trouble since she actually had to cause a disturbance. Stacey hired an eighteen-stone Irish woman named Lucky O'Malley, who had once been a female wrestler, and had very little in the way of a record—nothing more than a couple of drunk and disorderlies. She refused to take anything less than £50, realizing, as the others hadn't, that Stacey must have something big on.

The whole lot came to less than £100, so that there was cash to spare. Stacey paid them all half their money in advance, put the rest of the £100 aside, and went on a roaring drunk for a couple of days, during which he somehow managed to keep his mouth buttoned and his nose clean.

When he reported on Monday night to Mr. Payne he seemed to have everything fixed, including himself.

Straight Line was a reliable character, a young man who kept himself to himself. He pinched the car on Monday afternoon, took it along to the semilegitimate garage run by his father-in-law, and put new license plates on it. There was

no time for a respray job, but he roughed the car up a little so that the owner would be unlikely to recognize it if by an unlucky chance he should be passing outside Orbin's on Tuesday morning. During this whole operation, of course, Straight wore gloves.

He also reported to Mr. Payne on Monday night.

Lester's name was not really Lester—it was Leonard. His mother and his friends in Balham, where he had been born and brought up, called him Lenny. He detested this, as he detested his surname and the pimples that, in spite of his assiduous efforts with ointment, appeared on his face every couple of months. There was nothing he could do about the name of Jones, because it was on his National Insurance card, but Lester for Leonard was a gesture toward emancipation.

Another gesture was made when he left home and mother for a one-room flat in Notting Hill Gate. A third gesture—and the most important one—was his friendship with Lucille, whom he had met in a jazz club called The Whizz Fizz.

Lucille called herself an actress, but the only evidence of it was that she occasionally sang in the club. Her voice was

tuneless, but loud. After she sang, Lester always bought her a drink, and the drink was always whiskey.

"So what's new?" she said. "Lester-boy, what's new?"

"I sold a diamond necklace today. Two hundred and fifty pounds. Mr. Marston was very pleased." Mr. Marston was the manager of the Jewelry Department.

"So Mr. Marston was pleased. Big deal." Lucille looked round restlessly, tapping her foot.

"He might give me a raise."

"Another ten bob a week and a pension for your fallen aches."

"Lucille, won't you—"

"No." The peak of emancipation for Lester, a dream beyond which his thoughts really could not reach, was that one day Lucille would come to live with him. Far from that, she had not even slept with him yet. "Look, Lester-boy, I know what I want, and let's face it, you haven't got it."

He was incautious enough to ask, "What?"

"Money, moolah, the green folding stuff. Without it you're nothing, with it they can't hurt you."

Lester was drinking whiskey too, although he didn't really like it. Perhaps but for the whiskey he would never have

said, "Supposing I had money?"

"What money? Where would you get it—draw it out of the Savings Bank?"

"I mean a lot of money."

"Lester-boy, I don't think in penny numbers. I'm talking about real money."

The room was thick with smoke; the Whizz Fizz Kids were playing. Lester leaned back and said deliberately, "Next week I'll have money—thousands of pounds."

Lucille was about to laugh. Then she said, "It's my turn to buy a drink, I'm feeling generous. Hey, Joe. Two more of the same."

Later that night they lay on the bed in his one-room flat. She had let him make love to her, and he had told her everything.

"So the stuff's going to a man called Lambie in Greenly Street?"

Lester had never before drunk so much in one evening. Was it six whiskies or seven? He felt ill, and alarmed. "Lucille, you won't say anything? I mean, I wasn't supposed to tell—"

"Relax. What do you take me for?" She touched his cheek with red-tipped nails. "Besides, we shouldn't have secrets, should we?"

He watched her as she got

off the bed and began to dress. "Won't you stay? I mean, it would be all right with the landlady."

"No can do, Lester-boy. See you at the club, though. Tomorrow night. Promise."

"Promise." When she had gone he turned over onto his side and groaned. He feared that he was going to be sick, and he was. Afterwards, he felt better.

Lucille went home to her flat in Earl's Court which she shared with a man named Jim Baxter. He had been sent to Borstal for a robbery from a confectioner's which had involved considerable violence. Since then he had done two short stretches. He listened to what she had to say, then asked, "What's this Lester like?"

"A creep."

"Has he got the nerve to kid you, or do you think it's on the level, what he's told you?"

"He wouldn't kid me. He wants me to live with him when he's got the money. I said I might."

Jim showed her what he thought of that idea. Then he said, "Tuesday morning, eh. Until then, you play along with this creep. Any change in plans I want to know about it. You can do it, can't you, baby?"

She looked up at him. He

had a scar on the left side of his face which she thought made him look immensely attractive. "I can do it. And Jim?"

"Yes?"

"What about afterwards?"

"Afterwards, baby? Well, for spending money there's no place like London. Unless it's Paris."

Lester Jones also reported on Monday night. Lucille was being very kind to him, so he no longer felt uneasy.

Mr. Payne gave them all a final briefing and stressed that timing, in this as in every similar affair, was the vital element.

Mr. Rossiter Payne rose on Tuesday morning at his usual time, just after eight o'clock. He bathed and shaved with care and precision, and ate his usual breakfast of one soft-boiled egg, two pieces of toast, and one cup of unsugared coffee. When Miss Oliphant arrived he was already in the shop.

"My dear Miss Oliphant. Are you, as they say, ready to cope this morning?"

"Of course, Mr. Payne. Do you have to go out?"

"I do. Something quite unexpected. An American collector named—but I mustn't tell his name even to you, he doesn't want it known—is in London, and he has asked me

to see him. He wants to try to buy the manuscripts of—but there again I'm sworn to secrecy, although if I weren't I should surprise you. I am calling on him, so I shall leave things in your care until—" Mr. Payne looked at his expensive watch—"not later than midday! I shall certainly be back by then. In the meantime, Miss Oliphant, I entrust my ware to you."

She giggled. "I won't let anyone steal the stock, Mr. Payne."

Mr. Payne went upstairs again to his flat where, laid out on his bed, was a very different set of clothes from that which he normally wore. He emerged later from the little side entrance looking quite unlike the dapper, retired Guards officer known to Miss Oliphant.

His clothes were of the shabby nondescript ready-to-wear kind that might be worn by a City clerk very much down on his luck—the sleeve and trouser cuffs distinctly frayed, the tie a piece of dirty string. Curling strands of rather disgustingly gingery hair strayed from beneath his stained gray trilby hat and his face was gray too—gray and much lined, the face of a man of sixty who has been defeated by life.

Mr. Payne had bright blue eyes, but the man who came

out of the side entrance had, thanks to contact lenses, brown ones. This man shuffled off down the alley with shoulders bent, carrying a rather dingy suitcase. He was quite unrecognizable as Rossiter Payne.

Indeed, if there was a criticism to be made of him, it was that he looked almost too much the "little man." Long, long ago, Mr. Payne had been an actor, and although his dramatic abilities were extremely limited, he had always loved and been extremely good at make-up.

He took with him a realistic-looking gun that, in fact, fired nothing more lethal than caps. He was a man who disliked violence, and thought it unnecessary.

After he left Mr. Payne on Monday night, Stacey had been unable to resist having a few drinks. The alarm clock wakened him to a smell of frizzling bacon. His wife sensed that he had a job on, and she came into the bedroom as he was taking the Smith and Wesson out of the cupboard.

"Bill." He turned round. "Do you need that?"

"What do you think?"

"Don't take it."

"Ah, don't be stupid."

"Bill, please. I get frightened."

Stacey put the gun into his hip pocket. "Won't use it. Just makes me feel a bit more comfortable, see?"

He ate his breakfast with a good appetite and then telephoned Shrimp Bateson, Lucy O'Malley, and the Canadian, to make sure they were ready. They were. His wife watched him fearfully. Then he came to say goodbye.

"Bill, look after yourself."

"Always do." And he was gone.

Lucille had spent Monday night with Lester. This was much against her wish, but Jim had insisted on it, saying that he must know of any possible last-minute change.

Lester had no appetite at all. She watched with barely concealed contempt as he drank no more than half a cup of coffee and pushed aside his toast. When he got dressed his fingers were trembling so, he could hardly button his shirt.

"Today's the day, then."

"Yes. I wish it was over."

"Don't worry."

He said eagerly, "I'll see you in the club tonight."

"Yes."

"I shall have the money then, and we could go away together. Oh, no, of course not—I've got to stay on the job."

“That’s right,” she said, humoring him.

As soon as he had gone, she rang Jim and reported there were no last-minute changes.

Straight Line lived with his family. They knew he had a job on, but nobody talked about it. Only his mother stopped him at the door and said, “Good luck, son,” and his father said, “Keep your nose clean.”

Straight went to the garage and got out the Jag.

10:30.

Shrimp Bateson walked into the Fur Department with a brown-paper package under his arm. He strolled about pretending to look at furs, while trying to find a place to put down the little parcel. There were several shoppers and he went unnoticed.

He stopped at the point where Furs led to the stairs, moved into a window embrasure, took the little metal cylinder out of its brown-paper wrapping, pressed the switch which started the mechanism, and walked rapidly away.

He had almost reached the door when he was tapped on the shoulder. He turned. A clerk was standing with the brown paper in his hand.

“Excuse me, sir, I think you’ve dropped something. I found this paper—”

“No, no,” Shrimp said. “It’s not mine.”

There was no time to waste in arguing. Shrimp turned and half walked, half ran, through the doors and to the staircase. The clerk followed him. People were coming up the stairs, and Shrimp, in a desperate attempt to avoid them, slipped and fell.

The clerk was standing hesitantly at the top of the stairs when he heard the *whoosh* of sound and, turning, saw flames. He ran down the stairs then, took Shrimp firmly by the arm and said, “I think you’d better come back with me, sir.”

The bomb had gone off on schedule, setting fire to the window curtains and to one end of a store counter. A few women were screaming, and other clerks were busy saving the furs. Flack, one of the store detectives, arrived on the spot quickly, and organized the use of the fire extinguishers. They got the fire completely under control in three minutes.

The clerk, full of zeal, brought Shrimp along to Flack. “Here’s the man who did it.”

Flack looked at him. “Firebug, eh?”

“Let me go. I had nothing to do with it.”

“Let’s talk to the manager, shall we?” Flack said, and led Shrimp away.

The time was now 10:39.

Lucy O'Malley looked at herself in the glass, and at the skimpy hat perched on her enormous head. Her fake-crocodile hangbag, of a size to match her person, had been put down on a chair nearby.

"What do you feel, madam?" the young saleswoman asked, ready to take her cue from the customer's reaction.

"Terrible."

"Perhaps it isn't really you."

"It looks bloody awful," Lucy said. She enjoyed swearing, and saw no reason why she should restrain herself.

The salesgirl laughed perfunctorily and dutifully, and moved over again toward the hats. She indicated a black hat with a wide brim. "Perhaps something more like this?"

Lucy looked at her watch. 10:31. It was time. She went across to her handbag, opened it, and screamed.

"Is something the matter, madam?"

"I've been robbed!"

"Oh, really, I don't think that can have happened."

Lucy had a sergeant-major's voice, and she used it. "Don't tell me what can and can't have happened, young woman. My money was in here, and now it's gone. Somebody's taken it."

The salesgirl, easily intimi-

dated, blushed. The department supervisor, elegant, eagle-nosed, blue-rinsed, moved across like an arrow and asked politely if she could help.

"My money's been stolen," Lucy shouted. "I put my bag down for a minute, twenty pounds in it, and now it's gone. That's the class of people they get in Orbin's." She addressed this last sentence to another shopper, who moved away hurriedly.

"Let's look, shall we, just to make sure." Blue Rinse took hold of the handbag. Lucy took hold of it too, and somehow the bag's contents spilled onto the carpet.

"You stupid fool," Lucy roared.

"I'm sorry, madam," Blue Rinse said icily. She picked up handkerchief, lipstick, powder compact, tissues. Certainly there was no money in the bag. "You're sure the money was in the bag?"

"Of course I'm sure. It was in my purse. I had it five minutes ago. Someone here has stolen it."

"Not so loud, please, madam."

"I shall speak as loudly as I like. Where's your store detective, or haven't you got one?"

Sidley, the other detective on the third floor, was pushing through the little crowd that

had collected. "What seems to be the matter?"

"This lady says twenty pounds has been stolen from her handbag." Blue Rinse just managed to refrain from emphasizing the word "lady."

"I'm very sorry. Shall we talk about it in the office?"

"I don't budge until I get my money back." Lucy was carrying an umbrella, and she waved it threateningly. However, she allowed herself to be led along to the office. There the handbag was examined again and the salesgirl, now tearful, was interrogated. There also Lucy, having surreptitiously glanced at the time, put a hand into the capacious pocket of her coat, and discovered the purse. There was twenty pounds in it, just as she had said.

She apologized, although the apology went much against the grain for her, declined the suggestion that she should return to the hat counter, and left the store with the consciousness of a job well done.

"Well," Sidley said. "I shouldn't like to tangle with her on a dark night."

The time was now 10:40.

The clock in the Jewelry Department stood at exactly 10:33 when a girl came running in, out of breath, and said to

the manager, "Oh, Mr. Marston, there's a telephone call for Mr. Davidson. It's from America."

Marston was large, and inclined to be pompous. "Put it through here, then."

"I can't. There's something wrong with the line in this department—it seems to be dead."

Davidson had heard his name mentioned, and came over to them quickly. He was a crew-cut American, tough and lean. "It'll be about my wife, she's expecting a baby. Where's the call?"

"We've got it in Administration, one floor up."

"Come on, then." Davidson started off at what was almost a run, and the girl trotted after him. Marston stared at both of them disapprovingly. He became aware that one of his clerks, Lester Jones, was looking rather odd.

"Is anything the matter, Jones? Do you feel unwell?"

Lester said that he was all right. The act of cutting the telephone cord had filled him with terror, but with the departure of Davidson he really did feel better. He thought of the money—and of Lucille.

Lucille was just saying goodbye to Jim Baxter and his friend Eddie Grain. They were equipped with an arsenal of weapons, including flick knives,

bicycle chains, and brass knuckles. They did not, however, carry revolvers.

"You'll be careful," Lucille said to Jim.

"Don't worry. This is going to be like taking candy from a baby, isn't it, Eddie?"

"S'right," Eddie said. He had a limited vocabulary, and an almost perpetual smile. He was a terror with a knife.

The Canadian made the call from the striptease club. He had a girl with him. He had told her that it would be a big giggle. When he heard Davidson's voice—the time was just after ten thirty-four—he said, "Is that Mr. Davidson?"

"Yes."

"This is the James Long Foster Hospital in Chicago, Mr. Davidson, Maternity Floor."

"Yes?"

"Will you speak up, please. I can't hear you very well."

"Have you got some news of my wife?" Davidson said loudly. He was in a small booth next to the store switchboard. There was no reply. "Hello?"

The Canadian put one hand over the receiver, and ran the other up the girl's bare thigh. "Let him stew a little." The girl laughed. They could hear Davidson asking if they were still on the line. Then the Canadian spoke again.

"Hello, hello, Mr. Davidson. We seem to have a bad connection."

"I can hear you clearly. What news is there?"

"No need to worry, Mr. Davidson. Your wife is fine."

"Has she had the baby?"

The Canadian chuckled. "Now, don't be impatient. That's not the kind of thing you can hurry, you know."

"What have you got to tell me then? Why are you calling?"

The Canadian put his hand over the receiver again, said to the girl, "You say something."

"What shall I say?"

"Doesn't matter—that we've got the wires crossed or something."

The girl leaned over, picked up the telephone. "This is the operator. Who are you calling?"

In the telephone booth sweat was running off Davidson. He hammered with his fist on the wall of the booth. "Damn you, get off the line! Put me back to the Maternity Floor."

"This is the operator. Who do you want, please?"

Davidson checked himself suddenly. The girl had a Cockney voice. "Who are you? What's your game?"

The girl handed the telephone back to the Canadian, looking frightened. "He's on to me."

"Hell." The Canadian picked up the receiver again, but the girl had left it uncovered, and Davidson had heard the girl's words. He dropped the phone, pushed open the door of the booth, and raced for the stairs. As he ran he loosened the revolver in his hip pocket.

The time was now 10:41.

Straight Line brought the Jaguar smoothly to a stop in the space reserved for Orbin's customers, and looked at his watch. It was 10:32.

Nobody questioned him, nobody so much as gave him a glance. Beautiful, he thought, a nice smooth job, really couldn't be simpler. Then his hands tightened on the steering wheel.

He saw in the rear-view mirror, standing just a few yards behind him, a policeman. Three men were evidently asking the policeman for directions, and the copper was consulting a London place map.

Well, Straight thought, he can't see anything of me except my back, and in a couple of minutes he'll be gone. There was still plenty of time. Payne and Stacey weren't due out of the building until 10:39 or 10:40. Yes, plenty of time.

But there was a hollow feeling in Straight's stomach as he watched the policeman in his mirror.

Some minutes earlier, at 10:24, Payne and Stacey had met at the service elevator beside the Grocery Department on the ground floor. They had met this early because of the possibility that the elevator might be in use when they needed it, although from Lester's observation it was used mostly in the early morning and late afternoon.

They did not need the elevator until 10:30, and they would be very unlucky if it was permanently in use at that time. If they were that unlucky—well, Mr. Payne had said with the pseudo-philosophy of the born gambler, they would have to call the job off. But even as he said this he knew that it was not true, and that having gone so far he would not turn back.

The two men did not speak to each other, but advanced steadily toward the elevator by way of inspecting chow mein, hymettus honey, and real turtle soup. The Grocery Department was full of shoppers, and the two men were quite unnoticed. Mr. Payne reached the elevator first and pressed the button. They were in luck. The door opened.

Within seconds they were both inside. Still neither man spoke. Mr. Payne pressed the button which said 3, and then, when they had passed the

second floor; the button that said Emergency Stop. Jarringly the elevator came to a stop. It was now immobilized, so far as a call from outside was concerned. It could be put back into motion only by calling in engineers who would free the Emergency Stop mechanism—or, of course, by operating the elevator from inside.

Stacey shivered a little. The elevator was designed for freight, and therefore roomy enough to hold twenty passengers; but Stacey had a slight tendency to claustrophobia which was increased by the thought that they were poised between floors. He said, "I suppose that bloody thing will work when you press the button?"

"Don't worry, my friend. Have faith in me." Mr. Payne opened the dingy suitcase, revealing as he did so that he was now wearing rubber gloves. In the suitcase were two long red cloaks, two fuzzy white wigs, two thick white beards, two pairs of outsize horn-rimmed spectacles, two red noses, and two hats with large tassels. "This may not be a perfect fit for you, but I don't think you can deny that it's a perfect disguise."

They put on the clothes, Mr. Payne with the pleasure he always felt in dressing up.

Stacey with a certain reluctance. The idea was clever, all right, he had to admit that, and when he looked in the elevator's small mirror and saw a Santa Claus looking back at him, he was pleased to find himself totally unrecognizable. Deliberately he took the Smith and Wesson out of his jacket and put it into the pocket of the red cloak.

"You understand, Stacey, there is no question of using that weapon."

"Unless I have to."

"There is no question," Mr. Payne repeated firmly. "Violence is never necessary. It is a confession that one lacks intelligence."

"We got to point it at them, haven't we? Show we mean business."

Mr. Payne acknowledged that painful necessity by a downward twitch of his mouth, undiscernible beneath the false beard.

"Isn't it time yet?"

Mr. Payne looked at his watch. "It is now ten twenty-nine. We go—over the top, you might call it—at ten thirty-two precisely. Compose yourself to wait, Stacey."

Stacey grunted. He could not help admiring his companion, who stood peering into the small glass, adjusting his beard and mustache, and

settling his cloak more comfortably. When at last Mr. Payne nodded, and said, "Here we go," and pressed the button marked 3, resentment was added to admiration. He's all right now, but wait till we get to the action, Stacey thought. His gloved hand on the Smith and Wesson reassured him of strength and efficiency.

The elevator shuddered, moved upward, stopped. The door opened. Mr. Payne placed his suitcase in the open elevator door so that it would stay open and keep the elevator at the third floor. Then they stepped out.

To Lester the time that passed after Davidson's departure and before the elevator door opened was complete and absolute torture.

The whole thing had seemed so easy when Mr. Payne had outlined it to them. "It is simply a matter of perfect timing," he had said. "If everybody plays his part properly, Stace and I will be back in the lift within five minutes. Planning is the essence of this, as of every scientific operation. Nobody will be hurt, and nobody will suffer financially except"—and here he had looked at Lester with a twinkle in his frosty eyes—"except the insurance company. And I

don't think the most tenderhearted of us will worry too much about the insurance company."

That was all very well, and Lester had done what he was supposed to do, but he hadn't really been able to believe that the rest of it would happen. He had been terrified, but with the terror was mixed a sense of unreality.

He still couldn't believe, even when Davidson went to the telephone upstairs, that the plan would go through without a hitch. He was showing some costume jewelry to a thin old woman who kept roping necklaces around her scrawny neck, and while he did so he kept looking at the elevator, above which was the department clock. The hands moved slowly, after Davidson left, from 10:31 to 10:32.

They're not coming. Lester thought. It's all off. A flood of relief, touched with regret but with relief predominating, went through him. Then the elevator door opened, and the two Santa Clauses stepped out. Lester started convulsively.

"Young man," the thin woman said severely, "it doesn't seem to me that I have your undivided attention. Haven't you anything in blue and amber?"

It had been arranged that

Lester would nod to signify that Davidson had left the department, or shake his head if anything had gone wrong. He nodded now as though he had St. Vitus's Dance.

The thin woman looked at him, astonished. "Young man, is anything the matter?"

"Blue and amber," Lester said wildly, "amber and blue." He pulled out a box from under the counter and began to look through it. His hands were shaking.

Mr. Payne had been right in his assumption that no surprise would be occasioned by the appearance of two Santa Clauses in any department at this time of year. This, he liked to think, was his own characteristic touch—the touch of, not to be unduly modest about it, creative genius. There were a dozen people in the Jewelry Department, half of them looking at the Russian Royal Family Jewels, which had proved less of an attraction than Sir Henry Orbin had hoped. Three of the others were wandering about in the idle way of people who are not really intending to buy anything, and the other three were at the counters, where they were being attended to by Lester, a salesgirl whose name was Miss Glenny, and by Marston himself.

The appearance of the Santa Clauses aroused only the feeling of pleasure experienced by most people at sight of these slightly artificial figures of jollity. Even Marston barely glanced at them. There were half a dozen Santa Clauses in the store during the weeks before Christmas, and he assumed that these two were on their way to the Toy Department, which was also on the third floor, or to Robin Hood in Sherwood Forest tableau, which was this year's display for children.

The Santa Clauses walked across the floor together as though they were in fact going into Carpets and then on to the Toy Department, but after passing Lester they diverged. Mr. Payne went to the archway that led from Jewelry to Carpets, and Stacey abruptly turned behind Lester toward the Manager's Office.

Marston, trying to sell an emerald brooch to an American who was not at all sure his wife would like it, looked up in surprise. He had a natural reluctance to make a fuss in public, and also to leave his customer; but when he saw Stacey with a hand actually on the door of his own small but sacred office he said to the American, "Excuse me a moment, sir," and said to Miss

Glenny, "Look after this gentleman, please"—by which he meant that the American should not be allowed to walk out with the emerald brooch—and called out, although not so loudly that the call could be thought of as anything so vulgar as a shout, "Just a moment, please. What are you doing there? What do you want?"

Stacey ignored him. In doing so he was carrying out Mr. Payne's specific instructions. At some point it was inevitable that the people in the department would realize that a theft was taking place, but the longer they could be kept from realizing it, Mr. Payne had said, the better. Stacey's own inclination would have been to pull out his revolver at once and terrorize anybody likely to make trouble; but he did as he was told.

The Manager's Office was not much more than a cubbyhole, with papers neatly arranged on a desk; behind the desk, half a dozen keys were hanging on the wall. The showcase key, Lester had said, was the second from the left, but for the sake of appearances Stacey took all the keys. He had just turned to go when Marston opened the door and saw the keys in Stacey's hand.

The manager was not lacking in courage. He understood at

once what was happening and, without speaking, tried to grapple with the intruder. Stacey drew the Smith and Wesson from his pocket and struck Marston hard with it on the forehead. The manager dropped to the ground. A trickle of blood came from his head.

The office door was open, and there was no point in making any further attempt at deception. Stacey swung the revolver around and rasped, "Just keep quiet, and nobody else will get hurt."

Mr. Payne produced his cap pistol and said, in a voice as unlike his usual cultured tones as possible, "Stay where you are. Don't move. We shall be gone in five minutes."

Somebody said, "Well, I'm damned." But no one moved. Marston lay on the floor, groaning. Stacey went to the showcase, pretended to fumble with another key, then inserted the right one. The case opened at once. The jewels lay naked and unprotected. He dropped the other keys on the floor, stretched in his gloved hands, picked up the royal jewels, and stuffed them into his pocket.

It's going to work, Lester thought unbelievably, it's going to work. He watched, fascinated, as the cascade of shining stuff vanished into

Stacey's pocket. Then he became aware that the thin woman was pressing something into his hand. Looking down, he saw with horror that it was a large, brand-new clasp knife, with the dangerous-looking blade open.

"Bought it for my nephew," the thin woman whispered. "As he passes you, go for him."

It had been arranged that if Lester's behavior should arouse the least suspicion he should make a pretended attack on Stacey, who would give him a punch just severe enough to knock him down. Everything had gone so well, however, that this had not been necessary, but now it seemed to Lester that he had no choice.

As the two Santa Clauses backed across the room toward the service elevator, covering the people at the counters with their revolvers, one real and the other a toy, Lester launched himself feebly at Stacey, with the clasp knife demonstratively raised. At the same time Marston, on the other side of Stacey and a little behind him, rose to his feet and staggered in the direction of the elevator.

Stacey's contempt for Lester increased with the sight of the knife, which he regarded as an unnecessary bit of bravado. He shifted the revolver to his left hand, and with his right

punched Lester hard in the stomach. The blow doubled Lester up. He dropped the knife and collapsed to the floor, writhing in quite genuine pain.

The delivery of the blow delayed Stacey so that Marston was almost up to him. Mr. Payne, retreating rapidly to the elevator, shouted a warning, but the manager was on Stacey, clawing at his robes. He did not succeed in pulling off the red cloak, but his other hand came away with the wig, revealing Stacey's own cropped brown hair. Stacey snatched back the wig, broke away, and fired the revolver with his left hand.

Perhaps he could hardly have said himself whether he intended to hit Marston, or simply to stop him. The bullet missed the manager and hit Lester, who was rising on one knee. Lester dropped again. Miss Glenny screamed, another woman cried out, and Marston halted.

Mr. Payne and Stacey were almost at the elevator when Davidson came charging in through the Carpet Department entrance. The American drew the revolver from his pocket and shot, all in one swift movement. Stacey fired back wildly. Then the two Santa Clauses were in the service elevator, and the door closed on them.

Davidson took one look at the empty showcase, and shouted to Marston, "Is there an emergency alarm that rings downstairs?"

The manager shook his head. "And my telephone's not working."

"They've cut the line." Davidson raced back through the Carpet Department to the passenger elevators.

Marston went over to where Lester was lying, with half a dozen people round him, including the thin woman. "We must get a doctor."

The American he had been serving said, "I am a doctor." He was bending over Lester, whose eyes were wide open.

"How is he?"

The American lowered his voice. "He got it in the abdomen."

Lester seemed to be trying to raise himself up. The thin woman helped him. He sat up, looked around, and said, "Lucille." Then blood suddenly rushed out of his mouth.

The doctor bent over again, then looked up. "He's dead."

The thin woman gave Lester a more generous obituary than he deserved. "He wasn't a very good clerk, but he was a brave young man."

Straight Line, outside in the stolen Jag, waited for the

policeman to move. But not a bit of it. The three men with the policeman were pointing to a particular spot on the map, and the copper was laughing; they were having some sort of stupid joke together. What the hell, Straight thought, hasn't the bleeder got any work to do, doesn't he know he's not supposed to be hanging about? Why doesn't he move on?

Straight looked at his watch. 10:34, coming up to 10:35—and now, as the three men finally moved away, what should happen but that a teen-age girl should come up, and the copper was bending over toward her with a look of holiday good-will.

It's no good, Straight thought, I shall land them right in his lap if I stay here. He pulled away from the parking space, looked again at his watch. He was obsessed by the need to get out of the policeman's sight.

Once round the block, he thought, just once round can't take more than a minute, and I've got more than two minutes to spare. Then if the stupid copper's still here when I come back, I'll stay a few yards away from him with my engine running.

He moved down Jessiter Street and a moment after Straight had gone, the police-

man, who had never even glanced at him, moved away too.

By Mr. Payne's plan they should have taken off their Santa Claus costumes in the service elevator and walked out at the bottom as the same respectable, anonymous citizens who had gone in; but as soon as they were inside the elevator Stacey said, "He hit me." A stain showed on the scarlet right arm of his robe.

Mr. Payne pressed the button to take them down. He was proud that, in this emergency, his thoughts came with clarity and logic. He spoke them aloud.

"No time to take these off. Anyway, they're just as good a disguise in the street. Straight will be waiting. We step out and into the car, take them off there. Davidson shouldn't have been back in that department for another two minutes."

"I gotta get to a doctor."

"We'll go to Lambie's first. He'll fix it." The elevator whirled downward. Almost timidly, Mr. Payne broached the subject that worried him most. "What happened to Lester?"

"He caught one." Stacey was pale.

The elevator stopped. Mr. Payne adjusted the wig on

Stacey's head. "They can't possibly be waiting for us, there hasn't been time. We just walk out. Not too fast, remember. Casually, normally."

The elevator door opened and they walked the fifty feet to the Jessiter Street exit. They were delayed only by a small boy who rushed up to Mr. Payne, clung to his legs and shouted that he wanted his Christmas present. Mr. Payne gently disengaged him, whispered to his mother, "Our tea break. Back later," and moved on.

Now they were outside in the street. But there was no sign of Straight or the Jaguar.

Stacey began to curse. They crossed the road from Orbin's, stood outside Danny's Shoe Parlor for a period that seemed to both of them endless, but was, in fact, only thirty seconds. People looked at them curiously—two Santa Clauses wearing false noses—but they did not arouse great attention. They were oddities, yes, but oddities were in keeping with the time of year and Oxford Street's festive decorations.

"We've got to get away," Stacey said. "We're sitting ducks."

"Don't be a fool. We wouldn't get a hundred yards."

"Planning," Stacey said bit-

erly. "Fine bloody planning. If you ask me—"

"Here he is."

The Jag drew up beside them, and in a moment they were in and down Jessiter Street, away from Orbin's. Davidson was on the spot less than a minute later, but by the time he had found passers-by who had seen the two Santa Clauses get into the car, they were half a mile away.

Straight Line began to explain what had happened, Stacey swore at him, and Mr. Payne cut them both short.

"No time for that. Get these clothes off, talk later."

"You got the rocks?"

"Yes, but Stace has been hit. By the American detective. I don't think it's bad, though."

"Whatsisname, Lester, he okay?"

"There was trouble. Stace caught him with a bullet."

Straight said nothing more. He was not one to complain about something that couldn't be helped. His feelings showed only in the controlled savagery with which he maneuvered the Jag.

While Straight drove, Mr. Payne was taking off his own Santa Claus outfit and helping Stacey off with his. He stuffed them, with the wigs and beards and noses, back into the

suitcase. Stacey winced as the robe came over his right arm, and Mr. Payne gave him a handkerchief to hold over it. At the same time he suggested that Stacey hand over the jewels, since Mr. Payne would be doing the negotiating with the fence. It was a mark of the trust that both men still reposed in Mr. Payne that Stacey handed them over without a word, and that Straight did not object or even comment.

They turned into the quiet Georgian terrace where Lambie lived. "Number fifteen, right-hand side," Mr. Payne said.

Jim Baxter and Eddie Grain had been hanging about in the street for several minutes. Lucille had learned from Lester what car Straight was driving. They recognized the Jag immediately, and strolled toward it. They had just reached the car when it came to a stop in front of Lambie's house. Stacey and Mr. Payne got out.

Jim and Eddie were not, after all, too experienced. They made an elementary mistake in not waiting until Straight had driven away. Jim had his flick knife out and was pointing it at Mr. Payne's stomach.

"Come on now, dad, give us the stuff and you won't get hurt," he said.

On the other side of the car

Eddie Grain, less subtle, swung at Stacey with a shortened length of bicycle chain. Stacey, hit round the head, went down, and Eddie was on top of him, kicking, punching, searching.

Mr. Payne hated violence, but he was capable of defending himself. He stepped aside, kicked upward, and knocked the knife flying from Jim's hand. Then he rang the doorbell of Lambie's house. At the same time Straight got out of the car and felled Eddie Grain with a vicious rabbit punch.

During the next few minutes several things happened simultaneously. At the end of the road a police whistle was blown, loudly and insistently, by an old lady who had seen what was going on. Lambie, who also saw what was going on and wanted no part of it, told his manservant on no account to answer the doorbell or open the door.

Stacey, kicked and beaten by Eddie Grain, drew his revolver and fired four shots. One of them struck Eddie in the chest, and another hit Jim Baxter in the leg. Eddie scuttled down the street holding his chest, turned the corner, and ran slap into the arms of two policemen hurrying to the scene.

Straight, who did not care for shooting, got back into the Jag and drove away. He

abandoned the Jag as soon as he could, and went home.

When the police arrived with a bleating Eddie in tow they found Stacey and Jim Baxter on the ground, and several neighbors only too ready to tell confusing stories about the great gang fight that had just taken place. The interrogated Lambie, of course, but he had not seen or heard anything at all.

And Mr. Payne? With general melee taking place, and Lambie clearly not intending to answer his doorbell, he had walked away down the road. When he turned the corner he found a cab, which he took to within a couple of hundred yards of his shop. Then, an anonymous man carrying a shabby suitcase, he went in through the little side entrance.

Things had gone badly, he reflected as he again became Mr. Rossiter Payne the antiquarian bookseller, mistake had been made. But happily they were not his mistakes. The jewels would be hot, no doubt they would have to be kept for a while, but all was not lost.

Stacey and Straight were professionals—they would never talk. And although Mr. Payne did not, of course, know that Lester was dead, he realized that the young man would be

able to pose as a wounded hero and was not likely to be subjected to severe questioning.

So Mr. Payne was whistling as he went down to greet Miss Oliphant.

"Oh, Mr. Payne," she trilled. "You're back before you said. It's not half past eleven."

Could that be true? Yes, it was.

"Did the American collector—I mean, will you be able to sell him the manuscripts?"

"I hope so. Negotiations are proceeding, Miss Oliphant."

The time passed uneventfully until 2:30 in the afternoon when Miss Oliphant entered his little private office. "Mr. Payne, there are two gentlemen to see you. They won't say what it's about, but they look—well, rather funny."

As soon as Mr. Payne saw them and even before they produced their warrant cards, he knew that there was nothing funny about them. He took them up to the flat and tried to talk his way out of it, but he knew it was no use. They hadn't yet got search warrants; the Inspector said, but they would be taking Mr. Payne along anyway. It would save them some trouble if he would care to show them—

Mr. Payne showed them. He gave them the jewels and the Santa Claus disguises. Then he

sighed at the weakness of subordinates. "Somebody squealed, I suppose."

"Oh, no. I'm afraid the truth is you were a bit careless."

"I was careless?" Mr. Payne was genuinely scandalized.

"Yes. You were recognized."

"Impossible!"

"Not at all. When you left Orbin's and got out into the street, there was a bit of a mixup so that you had to wait. Isn't that right?"

"Yes, but I was completely disguised."

"Danny the shoeshine man knows you by name, doesn't he?"

"Yes, but he couldn't possibly have seen me."

"He didn't need to. Danny can't see any faces from his basement, as you know, but he did see something, and he came to tell us about it. He saw two pairs of legs, and the bottoms of some sort of red robes. And he saw the shoes. He recognized one pair of shoes, Mr. Payne. Not those you're wearing now, but that pair on the floor over there."

Mr. Payne looked across the room at the black shoes—shoes so perfectly appropriate to the role of shabby little clerk that he had been playing, and at the decisive, fatally recognizable sharp cut made by the bicycle mudguard in the black leather.

Libby MacCall

The PTA Mystery

A "lovely" background, realistically observed . . . about what happened at the PTA meeting of the Grover Cleveland Public School when the candidates for the School Board gave their electioneering speeches and then joined in the refreshments—and what happened was the first time it had ever happened in Riverview's history . . .

The red prowl car pulled up to the curb in front of the split-level house. The third from the corner, with gray shutters. The burly young cop disentangled his bulk from the steering wheel and headed for the front door.

He rang the bell, opened the door, and walked in.

"Norma?" he shouted.

"In the kitchen."

The imposing blue uniform loomed in the kitchen doorway, almost filling it completely. A young woman, presumably Norma, smiled a welcome. She went on ironing a child's blouse. A telephone receiver was tucked between her cheek and shoulder. She gestured toward the coffee pot at the back of the stove without interrupting the flow of her conversation into the mouth-piece.

"It was marvelous! Every time Warner opened his mouth he put his foot in it. He made a whole flock of new enemies last night. If he keeps on talking at meetings, and enough people hear him, he'll defeat himself. But let's not count on that. We have to go right on working for our good candidates. This town would be unbearable, with a bunch of book burners on the Board of Education.

"Besides, Mrs. Lo Presti sounds almost plausible while she's talking. But Warner's the real menace. Of course, somebody might shoot him. That would be the best permanent solution for an all-around stinker like that guy. Look, Sue, I've gotta hang up. My kid brother just walked in. 'Bye.'"

Norma interrupted her ironing long enough to remove the phone from her shoulder and

replace it on the hook.

"Howya doing, Fred? Want a doughnut?"

Fred, who was now seated at the table sipping coffee, shook his head.

"Thanks. Brenda says I'm getting too fat. So you had a good PTA meeting, did you? Big turnout?"

"It was mobbed. We haven't had this much interest in a School Board election in years. Thank goodness! Those two nuts had better get their wings clipped."

"One nut," said Fred.

"What?" exclaimed Norma. "You mean, one of them's chickened out? Which one? Come on. Give."

"That super-patriot, Mr. Eugene Warner, has been gathered to his fathers. As of this morning."

"You have to be kidding!"

Fred shook his head. "Nope. Headquarters got a call from his wife. They sent an ambulance, but he died before the hospital could do anything."

"What was it, Fred? Heart attack?"

"Don't know yet. They're doing an autopsy right now."

"Boy-oh-boy. Wait till I tell..."

"Hold on, now. You tell nobody. It'll be in the afternoon paper. I'm not supposed to be spreading the

news. Just stick to your ironing."

Fred rose. The small kitchen seemed suddenly filled with policeman.

"Okay," Norma nodded. "I wouldn't want to get you in trouble. But be sure you stop in tomorrow and tell me all about the autopsy. Say hello to Brenda."

"Yup. Thanks for the coffee. S'long."

As he went out, the phone rang. Norma reached out a long arm, seized the instrument, and nestled it into place against her neck. She guided the iron expertly over the sleeve of a small boy's shirt as she shouted, "Hello!" in her loud, cheerful voice.

"Mary! How's your cold? ... We missed you at the meeting... Yeah, almost three hundred. People seem really riled up about this election... Uh-huh. Anything that happened since 1900 is experimental. Let's throw out all the new methods and every book that's got a glimmer of an idea in it. Back to McGuffey's Reader and The Three R's. And run all the newcomers out of town. That's their platform. Disagree with them and that makes you a subversive."

"Yeah. Well, I can guess why. Mrs. Lo Presti thinks that way. When your husband's the

garbage man, even if he makes lots of money running the scavenger franchise, you got to push somebody else down to build yourself up . . . Warner? Uh, excuse me, something's boiling over."

She disconnected the call hastily. It was impossible to discuss Board of Education candidate Eugene Warner without revealing her inside information. She decided not to answer the phone again until the afternoon paper arrived. Everybody would be wanting to talk about the meeting. It was safer to pretend she was not home.

Norma finished the shirt and selected another roll of damp fabric from the basket.

As it turned out, Norma Hamlin, President of the Grover Cleveland Public School Parent-Teacher Association, had a chance to talk about the meeting before the afternoon paper was delivered. Fred drove up just after lunch, as she was dispatching her small son and daughter.

"Remember, now," she reminded them, "come straight home from school. Come on in, Fred."

Norma set his cup of coffee on the table, poured another for herself, placed it next to her at the sink, and started on the lunch dishes.

"So, what's new?" she demanded.

"Plenty. Somebody had no faith in democracy, I guess. Didn't trust the people to see through Mr. Eugene Warner and defeat him at the polls. The guy was murdered."

Norma gasped. She turned off the water, carried her coffee to the table, and collapsed into a chair. Her long legs in their trim slacks sprawled. She ran slim fingers through her neatly combed Italian cut, giving the hair an untidy look. Her dark eyes sparkled with excitement.

"It couldn't happen to a nicer guy."

"Yeah, maybe. But people weren't buying his hate talk. They'd never have voted him in. Now the Riverview Police Department has to find out who killed him. And in a heck of a hurry if we don't want a whole crew of county and state wheels revolving like mad around here. That's why I'm back. Tell me everything you can remember about that PTA meeting. But every single thing."

"Glad to. First, tell me how he was murdered."

"Oh. Sure. Poisoned—arsenic. Must have been something he ate at your meeting, his wife says. What did you have for refreshments?"

"Liptauer."

"Come again?" said Fred.

"I thought you'd like that.

We served an Austrian dish called Liptauer. You see, my neighbor, Hedy Green, was chairman of the Refreshment Committee for last night's meeting. You must know Hedy?"

"Cute little woman, kind of shy, with big eyes? Sort of soft and chubby? Her mother lives with her? Yeah, I know her. She put in a call for the prowl a couple months ago. Her mother had a sort of hysterical fit. I helped her quiet the old lady down and get a tranquilizer into her, while Hedy's husband was hunting up a doctor."

"I remember—Hedy told me. She said you were awfully nice. Poor old Mrs. Panzenhagen's had a rough time. You can see the concentration camp number tattooed on her arm. That's why she usually wears long sleeves, even in the summer. The Liptauer is one of her recipes, from the old country. We had our meeting of the Refreshment Committee at Hedy's house. Hedy served us Viennese coffee and this marvelous concoction. It's a mixture of cream cheese and anchovies, with capers and paprika and caraway seeds. Mrs. Panzenhagen had modeled it into the shape of a mushroom.

You spread it on rye bread or crackers."

"Whose idea was it to serve that for the meeting?"

"Golly, I don't remember who suggested it first. One of the girls, and everybody thought it was a great idea. Of course, we made some changes. Capers are too expensive for a PTA budget. And we didn't bother shaping the spread into a mushroom. We just mixed it up and made sandwiches. It was a nice change. We made ordinary fillings too—egg salad, tuna fish, stuff like that. But everybody liked the Liptauer best."

"Yeah, I bet. And anchovies have a good strong taste—strong enough to disguise poison. Norma, think. Whose idea was it? Mrs. Green's?"

"No, she's too timid to make a suggestion. I had a hard time even talking her into taking on this Committee job. I persuaded her because I thought it would be good for her. Hedy needs to get out and meet people and make friends. Now I wish I hadn't."

"Who else was on the Committee?"

"Diane Warner, Renata Cosello, and Myra Shapiro."

"How'd Hedy pick them?"

"They volunteered," said Norma unwittingly.

"Did they, now? Did they

know what the program would be?"

"Of course. Our January program is the same every year. We always have what we call a 'Candidates' Night,' so our members can meet all the people running for the Board of Education. Golly, Fred, I don't like this one bit. They're all friends of mine—nice girls with kids in school. Why does it have to be one of them?"

"Did anybody else have a chance to feed poison to Warner? Any outsiders come in the kitchen?"

"Not that I remember. But maybe he was given the poison after he left the meeting?"

"Somebody's checking that out. But I have to investigate what happened at the meeting. Tell me how it went."

"First we had Cub Scouts do the usual flag ceremony. Then came the Treasurer's report and the Secretary's minutes of the last meeting. Each candidate spoke for five minutes. After that we had questions."

"Were all seven candidates there?"

"Yes. Ours were in fine form. We have awfully good men running this year. Warner and Mrs. Lo Presti handed out their usual line of bilge—excuse me, but that's just what it is. You know—let's make our dear little town the lovely place it

used to be, with low taxes, no foreigners, no frills in the schools—no frills like science say. Who needs it? Oh, don't get me started!"

"Skip all that. I know how they talk and I know how you feel about it. Say, you didn't do it yourself, did you?"

"Don't laugh, Fred. It's no sillier than accusing those other women."

"Except that I've known you all my life. I know you always fight fair. You'd rather clobber them with a ballot box. Go on—get to the refreshments."

"There's not much to tell. The girls had the sandwiches and coffee and tea arranged on a big table. Everybody came up and helped themselves—buffet style. I don't see how... hey wait a minute! The candidates *didn't* help themselves. They sat down and the girls served them. But I wasn't paying any attention to how they did it. You'll have to ask them."

"Nobody else helped them?"

"Hedy's mother was out in the kitchen, filling pitchers from the coffee urn. She's too shy to come into the meeting room. Usually some of our PTA officers pitch in, if there's a big crowd. There's so much milling around—really, Fred, practically anybody could have done it and nobody'd have noticed."

"Well, thanks, sis. I better go talk to these dames. See you."

Fred turned the car in the direction of Diane Warner's house. Before he reached it, the two-way radio, which had been blatting steadily, summoned him back to headquarters. He promptly changed course.

"Yeah? Something new?" he asked the Chief of Police, who was presiding personally over the first murder in the history of Riverview.

"Darn right, something new. Mrs. Lo Presti called. She just heard about Warner. Man, is she excited. Says somebody tried to murder her too. She was sick all night. Better get right over there and see her, before she busts a blood vessel."

Fred steered his revised course to the Lo Presti abode, a pink stucco mansion in Spanish style, woefully out of place among the surrounding trim brick houses.

Mrs. Lo Presti, a lady of imposing dimensions, in a pink nylon housecoat, answered the door. She looked pale and agitated. She invited Fred to be seated in her expensively and garishly furnished living room, and treated him to a lengthy tirade on the subject of her sufferings before she allowed him to ask any questions.

"What did you have for

dinner last night? Did anyone else in the family get sick?"

"Of course they didn't. I'm telling you, they tried to poison me at that PTA meeting. I'm just lucky I liked what they served, or I'd be dead, like poor martyred Mr. Warner."

"What did you eat?"

"I had some sandwiches with a very unusual filling. It was delicious. But Mr. Warner, poor soul, took only one bite. He said it tasted awful. After that he just drank coffee. I ate so much that I threw it all up after I got home. Oh, I was horribly sick. How those people..."

"Please, Mrs. Lo Presti: Just answer my questions. Have you any idea who served you the sandwiches?"

"No, I wasn't noticing. Mr. Warner and I were discussing campaign strategy. Anyway, I'm not personally acquainted with people of that type."

"Nobody else was sitting with you—no one but you and Mr. Warner?"

"Not while we were eating. The other candidates were all at another table together. Mr. Warner and I sat by ourselves to talk for a few minutes. What fools we were, making it so easy for them."

"Who do you mean by 'them'?"

"Why, the murderers, of course."

"Have you any idea who they might be?"

"Not exactly, but I'm sure it was the women who served us. Who else could it be? Some of those awful foreigners, moving into our lovely little town and causing so much trouble. And now this . . ."

Hastily, Fred made his escape. A very poor witness this woman. Highly emotional. She'd make a terrible School Board member, he thought. Hard to work with. Well, that was neither here nor there. He'd get back to interviewing his suspects, but he didn't look forward to it. They weren't exactly friends of his, but he knew them all. In a town this size everybody knew everybody, more or less.

Diane Warner was sitting on the steps of her small house, watching over her trike-riding three-year-old. She greeted Fred pleasantly.

"I came to ask you what you can remember about last night," he said. "I guess you've heard by now that Mr. Warner was murdered. And Mrs. Lo Presti says she would have been too, except she ate so much she threw it all up."

"I'd be a hypocrite if I said I was sorry," said Mrs. Warner. A slim, delicate blonde, carefully made up, she spoke with a slight French accent. She

looked very young and helpless.

"My ex-father-in-law was a monster. He was loaded with hostility. He hated so many things and so many people. Anything that was different. Most certainly he hated me. He broke up our marriage, setting my husband against me . . ."

She began to cry. The tears that rolled down her cheeks were faintly blue from her eye make-up.

"I'm sorry," said Fred, "but I do have to ask you some questions. Did you help serve him and Mrs. Lo Presti?"

"No, I stayed far away from him. There were plenty of others to do it. I served the other candidates."

"Who did take care of them?"

"I have no idea. But we all helped make the sandwiches. Any of us could be responsible." The red-cheeked boy, who had been riding solemnly back and forth at the far end of the garden, turned around and began pedaling vigorously toward his mother. "Here comes my son. Please go away. I don't wish to explain what you're doing here."

Fred went. His next stop, a few blocks away, was at the shabby old frame house inhabited by the Shapiros. The front yard was full of noisy pre-schoolers. They swarmed all

over the police car, but stood back respectfully when he instructed them to do so.

"Want to help me out?" asked Fred, who was used to dealing with neighborhood kids. "Listen to the radio for me, and if they say Car. Seventy-two come call me. I have to talk to your mom—need to get some advice from her."

He left the kids listening intently, their eyes round with new respect for their mother, from whom a real live cop was seeking advice.

With many apologies Mrs. Shapiro admitted Fred into a house so lived in as to be frankly untidy. The lady of the house was comfortably fat, with brightly golden hair that showed an inch of black at the roots. She wore a paint-smudged smock and had a paint brush stuck behind her ear.

Fred followed her into the dining room, where the table bore a hodge-podge of ceramic tiles and a rainbow of paint pots. Renata Cosello, in a fresh smock that did not entirely conceal her provocative figure, sat painting industriously. She bestowed a sultry glance on the sturdy guardian of local law, and showed her white teeth in a brief smile.

"Excuse the mess," said Mrs. Shapiro. "This is my workroom. We eat in the kitchen.

It's not the best-paying business in the world. With the kids so little, I have to work at home. I'm lucky Renata can help me out when I get a big order. My husband does his best, but you know what teachers make."

"If we elect the right people to the Board of Education," said Mrs. Cosello, "maybe the teachers will get the raise they're entitled to. Anyway, we don't have to worry about Mr. Low-Taxes Warner any more."

"That's what I came to talk about," said Fred. "I don't know how much you've heard, but I guess you know at least as much as I do. The grapevine in this town is pretty efficient."

"They're saying he was poisoned at our meeting," said Renata Cosello coolly, "so it follows that we must have done it. Murder by the Refreshment Committee. Ha!"

"They'll excommunicate us from the PTA, if you can prove it," said Mrs. Shapiro.

"Ladies, this is no joking matter. Mr. Warner really did die from something he ate at your meeting. There was no dinner left in his stomach, just that one bite of sandwich. So the poison must have been in the sandwiches. Now, nobody's saying you did it. But we're hoping you can help us find whoever did. For instance, who actually served Mr. Warner?"

"We did." Mrs. Cosello's thick lashes drooped over her velvety dark eyes in an exaggerated imitation of an Italian movie star in a close-up. "But we gave him the same food everybody else was eating. How do you suppose we managed it?"

"And why. Don't forget why." Myra Shapiro began to paint again. "I admit it, was a temptation, but you really can't kill off all the candidates who don't agree with you. It's the hard way to get your husband a raise, don't you think?"

"What about me?" asked Mrs. Cosello. "My husband's not a teacher."

"Look, quit needling me. I'm just doing my job. Did anyone else come near that table while Mrs. Lo Presti and Mr. Warner were eating together?"

"We didn't have time to notice," said Mrs. Shapiro. "There were a lot of hungry people there last night. We gave them sandwiches, poured coffee, and left the two of them with their heads together, plotting away. That's all we know. Innocent till proved guilty is the law, I believe."

"That's right," said Fred, giving it up as a bad job. "If you just happen to remember anything, please get in touch with me."

He thanked the kids for watching his car so efficiently, then drove slowly across town. The attitude of those two was most peculiar, he felt. And Mrs. Warner had taken no pains to mask her dislike of her father-in-law. Either they were all so innocent that it didn't occur to them to worry, or they were all in it together and had agreed to brazen it out.

He pulled up in front of the Greens' Cape Cod clapboard, having reached no conclusion. He had left Hedy Green until last, since she lived directly behind Norma. He could stop to confer with his sister before returning to headquarters to report.

All was not well at the Greens'. Hedy looked wan and red-eyed.

"Please," she said, "if you don't mind, come into the kitchen. It's my mother. She's terrified of being alone, even for a moment."

"Okay," said Fred.

"She's been upset ever since that meeting of the PTA Refreshment Committee," Hedy went on. "Mother was happy to make one of her special recipes, for company. And she seemed to enjoy having the girls here. But then they began talking about the candidates who would be speaking at the meeting. One of them said

Mrs. Lo Presti and Mr. Warner were just like the Nazis, and that was enough to upset her. The doctor wants me to put her in a home for the aged. He says it's bad for my little girl."

"That's tough. I hate to bother you with more trouble. But I'm afraid I do have to ask you a few questions. I guess you know that Mr. Warner was murdered."

"Yes, I know. It's terrible."

"I'm wondering if you can remember: the day the women met here, which one of them suggested having that stuff with the anchovies in it for the candidates meeting?"

"The Liptauer? I'm not positive, but I think it was Mrs. Warner."

"Will you tell me exactly how you prepared it? Did you do it at the school? Who bought the food?"

"Mrs. Warner and I bought everything at the supermarket on the day of the meeting. Mother came with us and waited in the car while we shopped. We took the coffee and cream and stuff to the school kitchen. The others met us there. We filled the sugar bowls, arranged the buffet table with paper cups and plates—oh, all the things you have to do. Then the girls came over here and we mixed up the Liptauer and the other spreads, and

made the sandwiches. We wrapped them in waxed paper and wet towels, and put them in my refrigerator. That night I took them over to school in a cardboard carton."

"Was somebody in the school kitchen the whole evening? Could anyone who wasn't on the Refreshment Committee have gone in there without being noticed?"

"Mother was there. She was afraid to come out. The rest of us listened to the speeches. But anyone could have gone in. I don't think she knew who was on the Committee and who wasn't. She says all American women look alike."

"Who served Mrs. Lo Presti and Mr. Warner?"

Hedy Green looked up at the big cop with an anguished expression. "Do I have to say?"

"Yes, Mrs. Green, I'm afraid you do."

"I'd rather not. But if I must, it was Myra Shapiro and Renata Cosello."

"Don't worry about giving them away. They already told me. I was just checking out their story."

Hedy gave a great sigh of relief. "Oh, thank you for saying that. They're all such nice, good people. They wouldn't do anything so terrible as . . ." She left the sentence unfinished.

"Okay, Mrs. Green. I'll be going now. But I may have to come back later with more questions. I hope your mother is better soon."

As Fred let himself in at Norma's, her brash, noisy tones could be heard from the kitchen.

"Okay, you two. That's enough cookies. You didn't study that hard. Run out and play."

Then two children galloped past him, each clutching a handful of freshly baked hermits. Fred opened the cookie jar, helped himself, and sat down at the kitchen table. Norma stooped to put a casserole into the oven.

"Any luck?" she asked.

"Not much. I didn't get far." He gave her a brief summary of his activities. "How about telling me what you know about all these dames?" he concluded.

"Gee, Fred, I feel like a female Judas. You know me. I like a good gossip as much as the next one—maybe better. But talking about your friends, when it might lead to having a murder pinned on them..."

"You think murder is ever justified? You may have disapproved of his politics, but Warner had a wife and family, you know."

"Okay. You win. Diane

Warner was married to the oldest son. She insists her father-in-law broke up her marriage, just because she comes from France—Paris, I guess it was. Her father's with some perfume company here in the United States. Don't you remember when they moved here? She was in high school then, I think."

"Yeah. She was in my wife's class. Brenda says the boys went crazy over her. The girls all thought she was a spoiled, selfish brat. Brenda always said if Diane and her husband were really getting along so great, it wouldn't have been easy to break them up. Brenda thinks sonny-boy blamed the bust-up on papa and used him as an excuse to get away. Well, that's opinion, not fact. Can't put it in my report. What about the others?"

"Myra Shapiro. Her husband's a teacher at the High School. Myra says Warner told him he'd make it too hot for him once he was on the School Board. Mr. Shapiro happens to be a wonderful teacher. Sure he's a very liberal thinker—at the other end of the scale from Warner. They couldn't be in the same room two minutes without clashing. But, Fred, he had tenure—Warner couldn't have had him fired. Myra just wouldn't..."

"Hot-tempered, isn't she? She's got that reputation."

"She blows up, lets off steam, and it's over."

"What about Renata Cosello?"

"Well, she's furious over all this talk about foreigners, and newcomers being bad for the town. She always says: the first Mr. Warner was a foreigner too. Renata's been sore at Warner ever since she moved here. When they bought their house, Warner was the real estate agent. The Cosellos claim he cheated them."

"How?"

"Renata says they were so green that they believed everything he told them. Like, they could save money by not having a lawyer—he'd take care of everything. He gave them a paper, which they trustingly signed. Turned out he then collected a fee for representing them, even bigger than a lawyer's would have been. Not to mention that he did nothing to earn it. Oh, they were wild. But they'd signed, so they were stuck with it."

"You know," Fred remarked, "I can't see Mrs. Cosello knocking the guy off two years later. She didn't strike me as a grudge holder."

"I agree—but then, none of these gals is my idea of a cold-blooded killer."

"You haven't mentioned Mrs. Green," Fred prompted.

"What should I say? Hedy keeps house, takes care of her little girl and her mother, who's more trouble than the kid. That's why I talked Hedy into being on the Committee. I thought if she didn't get an outside interest she'd go nuts. So what happens? She gets mixed up in a murder. Oh, Fred, I feel terrible about it."

"How could you know? Nothing like this ever happened in town before. Well, back to the salt mines. They'll hand me my head when they hear what I have to show for a whole afternoon of running around. Maybe some of the other guys had better luck. So long."

The red prowl car, like a milkman's tired horse, wended its way back to headquarters where Fred's report was greeted with something less than enthusiasm.

"Fred, as a detective you're a great cop," said the Chief. "Let's hear what Steve has to report."

"Spent the whole day over at the school," said Steve. "Those dames did a wonderful job of cleaning up that kitchen. Nothing left in it. At least, the garbage man cooperated with us. He doesn't pick up till tomorrow. There were three full ash-cans out in back. We

went through every dirty paper plate and cup. Found the empty waxed papers the sandwiches had been wrapped in. I brought them back. There was a mess of half-eaten sandwiches, dirty napkins, tea bags, and coffee grounds. Period."

"Let's see the waxed papers."

Steve opened the crumpled pieces of damp waxed paper, brushing off coffee grounds. Each length contained a slip of blue paper on which was written in pencil, *Egg, Liplauer, Tuna, or Salmon.*

"What's that?" said Fred.

He pointed to a slip of paper which bore only some penciled numbers: 752743. The Chief picked up the paper.

"Funny. It's the only one that's different."

"Maybe that was to identify the poisoned sandwiches," Fred suggested.

"Okay, boy, there's your assignment for tomorrow. Find out which one of your dames wrote this and what it's supposed to mean. She better have a good story."

Fred inspected the paper.

"That's queer," he said. "Look at the sevens. They have a line through the tails. I never saw anybody write a seven like that."

"I did," said Steve. "In high school my French teacher did. I

think all Europeans do."

"Any of your refreshment dames go to school in Europe, Fred?" asked the Chief.

"Mrs. Warner did. I'll check on the others."

"Do that. First thing tomorrow."

The red police car was becoming a familiar sight in front of the Greens' house. Before Fred could ring, Norma appeared at the door.

"Come on in, but be quiet," she whispered. "I saw you through the window. Hedy's mother's sleeping. I'm just convincing Hedy she should get some rest too." She turned to Hedy. "Your kid can have lunch at my house."

"Look what we found," said Fred. He held out the crumpled blue paper. "Know what it is?"

Hedy Green looked at it for a long moment. Then she burst into tears.

"That's mother's concentration camp number. Where did you find it?"

"In the garbage can at the school, mixed up with the sandwich wrappings."

Hedy gave a great gulp, wiped her eyes, and looked up resolutely.

"I'll have to tell you," she said. "I killed Mr. Warner—yes, it was me. I did it for the sake of my little girl. There will be

no Fascists in her life. I won't let it happen again, not here in America. I used rat poison. I knew the strong taste of anchovies would cover up the taste of the poison. I wrapped up the extra sandwiches and marked them with this paper, so they wouldn't get mixed up with the others."

"Why did you write that particular number?" asked Fred.

"What would you have put? Poison? I used the number to give me courage in case I lost my nerve. I was the one who gave the poisoned sandwiches to Mr. Warner and Mrs. Lo Presti."

"Hedy, you're lying," said Norma. She turned to Fred. "She never left that buffet table. She was busy pouring coffee the whole time we were serving refreshments. I was standing right next to her, pouring tea."

"Where were you born, Mrs. Green?" Fred asked.

She stared at him blankly. "What has that to do with it?"

"Never mind. Just answer me."

"I was born in the Bronx."

"And where did you go to school?"

"In the Bronx."

"Then how come you write your sevens the way Europeans do?"

Hedy Green began to cry again. Fred strode to the telephone and dialed Mrs. Shapiro's number.

"Where did you get the sandwiches you served Warner?" he asked without ceremony. "Did you take them from the refreshment trays on the buffet table? I have a pretty good idea of the answer, so you may as well tell the truth..."

Yeah... Okay, thanks." He hung up.

"What did she say?" asked Norma.

"She says, Mrs. Green's mother, Mrs. Panzenhagen, handed her a paper plate of sandwiches as she was leaving the kitchen. 'For the Fascist hounds,' the old lady said. Mrs. Shapiro thought she was kidding. When she heard about the murder she guessed what must have happened. But she didn't lie to me. She just didn't tell all she knew. Thought she'd protect the old lady. Like you, Mrs. Green. It's a good thing Norma was here."

"No! No! You can't arrest mother. She didn't know what she was doing."

"We know," said Norma. "So does your doctor. They'll just put her where she can get good care. Really, Hedy, you'll all be better off to have her in a good home. Now, don't worry."

"I'll trouble you for what's left of that rat poison, before I go back to make my report," said Fred. Hedy fetched it and Fred read the label. "Yep. Arsenic trioxide. That's what they found when they did the p.m. How did you know she used rat poison, Mrs. Green?"

"We always keep some in the house—on a high shelf, of course. Mother likes to see it

there. She was so afraid of the rats—in the concentration camp. Yesterday I noticed that somebody had squeezed the tube. And I knew we didn't have any rats."

"I'm on my way, then. The Chief will have to eat his words about me not being a good detective. But if I never have to do it again, it will be soon enough for me."



Gerald Kersh

Karmesin Takes Pen in Hand

Another Karmesin Kaper... Remember that Karmesin is either the greatest criminal of all time or—whisper the words, don't dare shout them—the greatest liar of all time; but either way he is vastly entertaining...

Criminal: KARMESIN

"I wonder," I said to Karmesin, "why you don't write your life story, your memoirs."

Karmesin let loose one of his elephantine laughs—*Heeeeeeeaaagh!*—and slapped me on the back.

"I don't see what there is to laugh at."

Karmesin, still guffawing, replied, "But I do. No, my young friend, I cannot write my life story. At least, I could write it—but I could never sell it."

"Of course you could."

"Not so, my enthusiastic young friend, not so. I have already sold it."

"To whom?" I asked.

"That is a story in itself," said Karmesin. He unraveled a little heap of cigarette ends and began to reroll them. "I am one of the few people who has made a hundred thousand out

of an autobiography."

"A hundred thousand pounds!"

"Certainly—not shillings. I have made money out of literature. Did you ever hear of my publishing venture? The opposite of *Who's Who*? I called it *Nobodies*."

"I never heard of it."

"Exactly."

"When was it published?"

"It never was."

"And when was your life story published?"

"It never was."

"Then I don't see—"

"My friend, you are a journalist, eh? Then I say to you: there is money in journalism, but more money is made out of writing that never sees the light."

"Will you explain all this?"

"Certainly," said Karmesin, poking out a tongue such as one

usually sees on porcelain dishes in delicatessen shops and moistening the gummed edge of a cigarette paper . . .

My Directory (said Karmesin) was my first venture in publishing. That was in America—in 1913—or perhaps it was 1923. I was living in a town with the barbarous name of Loco City. It had been a bad man's town in the 1870's, a silver town, where millions were made and lost in a single day, and wild miners dashed down hatfuls of silver dollars in exchange for bogus drinks.

An eccentric millionaire—of the type of "Silver Dollar" Yates—had built the town on wild and rococo lines. There was an Opera House, for example, with an auditorium large enough to seat three times the population of Loco City. There was a bar built to resemble the famous old Horse Shoe Bar in Chicago; it was so long that you were drunk on the smell of drink before you walked from one end to the other.

But all that belonged to the past. In 1913—or was it 1923?—Loco City was populated by a new generation of townspeople: respectable middle-class American businessmen; estate agents who called themselves realtors; young men with

rimless glasses who had forgotten how their grandfathers had loitered on corners displaying notched gun-butts and Bowie knives.

It was all very simple. I started the Stars and Stripes Publishing Company, Inc., and began a local Directory which I called *Nobodies*. I drew up the histories of Loco City families—it read like the Newgate Calendar. Then I had a series of potted biographies of Loco City celebrities, and put down exactly what they did when they went to Buyers and Association Conventions—how the President of the Loco City Bank had been seen escorting three intoxicated blondes in the streets of San Francisco; how another man, a buyer of mortgages, had been photographed wearing some lady's corset, trying to milk a mule into a champagne bottle in Memphis. It was very simple, I tell you, and very amusing.

I sent galley proofs of my Directory to the gentlemen concerned and they paid me *not* to include them. Then I started a Social Register, and the same people paid me to be included in its aristocratic columns; and then I left town with \$50,000 in my pocket. I could have made similar sums in every city of the United States, only I got tired of the business.

I had a good idea for a variation of the Directory of Directors—an exclusive little volume called *Is Their Credit Good?*—a list of business failures, dead beats, and bankrupts. It is all very easy, as long as you don't cast aspersions on womanhood. But this is only to illustrate how easily money can be made out of literature . . .

I was speaking of my life story. That is something quite different. It was my last big coup. When I think of it, I am sad, my friend. It was Karmesin's Hundred Days—the last flicker of the greatest brain of the century . . . What a man I was then! What a brain I had! I was the Napoleon of Crime.

So! In those days I used to know a publisher, a very good fellow who is now dead. He was something of a wild man. I helped him out of a scrape—something to do with a woman with red hair who used to wait for him in his own waiting room with a loaded revolver in her left hand and a small bottle of strychnine in her right, together with a bundle of incriminating letters.

It was a very nice little situation, most amusing . . . It was he who said to me, "My dear Karmesin, if you wrote your life story, you would make money out of it."

"How much?" I asked.

"Well, you might make five thousand dollars—a thousand pounds, or perhaps two thousand."

He did not know what manner of man I was, this unhappy publisher; he did not realize that he affronted me by even mentioning such small change, such birdseed! But I simply smiled and said, "You assume that I would bother to write a book for five—or maybe only *one*—thousand pounds?"

"We might commission it," he said.

"And what, exactly, does that mean?"

"It is the practice of most reputable publishers," he said, "to advance money before a book is written—that is, if they have confidence in the author."

"Oh," I said, and took him to lunch.

I bought him three pounds' worth of food and drink, which took a bit of consuming at the prices of those days, and filled his mouth with a cigar as thick as your wrist . . . Have you got a cigarette? What was money to me then, anyway? Easy come, easy go. So I went away and thought.

I said to myself: *Just for fun, I will write a synopsis of my life story which I shall entitle: I HAVE STOLEN FIVE MILLION POUNDS.*

And I sat down, with a pad

of cream-laid paper before me, and a pen with a wide nib.

I wish you could have seen that synopsis. It was superb. Beginning with my early childhood, it covered about fifty years of my life. There was a different crime on nearly every page. When there was no crime, there was a brilliant criminal idea. I explained every unsolved crime mystery since the year 1890, when I really got going in the business.

Most of what I said was true. The affair of Lombard's Bank, the silly business of the gas meter, the affair of the Schnitzelbank Bonds, the horrible story of how I nearly became involved in the Xarro Valley Massacre; how I stole the Crown Jewels of the Maharajah of Bhang by means of a pot of glue and three pennyworth of tape; what happened to the famous Tyrone Opals; how I smuggled the Guayacum Pearls into Paris in an artificial hump; how I sent a message and a diagram to an agent of mine through three countries in every one of which a regiment of police were on the lookout; the reason why Goltensnobf the Jelly King has a nervous tic in his right eye; what happened to the Fourth Consignment of Opium—I tell you, a million stories, each more ingenious than the last!

When I had finished, I found myself reading the synopsis with the liveliest interest—that is how good it was! I had succeeded in attracting my own attention, so that I put my outline down with a sigh, and thought: *What a man this Karmesin is—what a devil of a man!*

I tell you, there is no vanity like the vanity of authorship. I was piqued. My curiosity was aroused. I wanted to see exactly how the publishing world would receive the synopsis that I had been so enthralled with.

I went to a good typewriting agency and had one thousand copies made, which I then sent to every publisher in the United States, England, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Holland, Portugal, Spain, and Patagonia.

Then I waited to see who would offer me the most.

My first reply was from Kiljoy and Mudd of London. I had expected hysteria, and wild compliments. They said something like this:

Dear Sir,

We have read your synopsis (and so on, and so on) which we find very entertaining.

Although we are not in the habit of commissioning works of this sort, we might be

prepared to make an exception in your case . . .

and went on, the imbeciles, to offer me £50 down, £25 on day of publication, and twopence a week for life—some such ridiculous nonsense! A royalty of .025 per cent on the first 500,000 copies—something like that. It was very little.

I roared with rage and seized my heaviest walking stick. Then I stopped and laughed. It was really too funny. Me! Karmesin! The greatest of all criminals, and the most successful, to be offered £75 for the inside story of his fabulous and prodigious career! I laughed at the top of my voice, and put the letter in a drawer.

Soon more letters came. One offered me £15 down for the world copyright. Another went so far as to suggest an advance of £100. The offers poured in. I got 716 replies, and the average down payment was £50.

I sent each one a testing letter saying: "Double your offer and I accept—"

No good. They wouldn't. I circularized the publishing firms in other countries—you know I am a linguist. I got another 107 offers, in all kinds of little sums in pesos, cruzeiros, escudos, piastres, bolivars—God only knows what Noah's Ark of currency!

And then, do you know what?

I found that I had wasted six months of my valuable time in this infernal literary work! Six months! It is true, I was not hard pressed for money, and was merely amusing myself seeing what they would offer.

I awoke to the fact, however, that I was not properly appreciated anywhere in the world. I was disgusted with the literary profession. Publishers were not my type. No. Besides, why should I write my life story? Pfui! Am I a society beauty? The devil I am! Bah. I said to myself: *My lad, you will write nothing more—ever!*

And I did not . . .

Karmesin furtively ate a piece of sugar.

I said to him, "But all this leads nowhere. You said you made money out of your life story. And now you say you abandoned the whole project. What is one to believe?"

With terrible dignity Karmesin looked at me and said, "Permit me, please, to finish what I was saying. I said that I would write nothing more. *Bon.* I also said to myself: *You shall be revenged, my friend, on these bookmen who treat you like an ordinary human being.*

"So I took my wide-nibbed

pen in hand and wrote 823 letters accepting every offer that was made to me and—to cut a long story short—I received about £40,000 from the whole of the world's publishing business, for options on my life story."

"Which you never wrote, eh?"

"Quite."

"Hum," I said.

"And what the devil do you mean by 'hum,' may I ask?"

"It doesn't sound likely."

"So. So-o-o. You mean, I am a liar?"

"No, Karmesin, I didn't say that... Besides, you said, at first, that you made a hundred thousand pounds. And now you say only forty thousand. What is one to think?"

"My young friend," said Karmesin, as one who reasons with a small child, "am I to remember every trifling sum of money I have made and spent? Am I a clerk? Am I a bookkeeper? Do I make a double entry in seven different kinds of ink every time I buy a pair of bootlaces? Forty thousand, fifty thousand, a hundred thousand—bah, bah, and bah! It is all birdseed, pocket money. What can you do with a hundred thousand pounds? Are you a millionaire with such a sum? No. Then what is the use of it? *Ptcha*. In my room there are six empty beer bottles. If you take them back to the store, we can get fourpence on each of them and buy a packet of cigarettes. Let us go..."



Robert L. Fish

The Adventure of the Big Plunger

One of the Great Defective's (sic) earlier cases ("lost to these many years" and at long last "resurrected")... what a "ludicrous Lecoq" the indomitable and inimitable Schlock Homes is!—in the great parody tradition (summa cum laughter) of Robert Barr's, Sherlaw Kombs (1894), R. C. Lehmann's Picklock Holes (1901), Bret Harte's Hemlock Jones (1902), John Kendrick Bangs's Shylock Homes (1903), Oswald Crawford's Purlock Hone (1906), and Maurice Leblanc's Holmlock Shears or Herlock Sholmes (1907)...

Detective: SCHLOCK HOMES

To my friend Mr. Schlock Homes, inactivity was the deadliest foe with which he was ever forced to grapple. At those times, when interesting cases were not forthcoming, he would lie slumped in his chair before the fireplace in our quarters at 221B Bagel Street, his eyes dull and unseeing, lighting one Armenian from another and allowing them to burn out in his fingers. I had warned him many times that the scars would remain, but when Homes was in one of his moods it was most difficult to reason with him.

I was most strongly reminded of this characteristic of his quite recently when, in the

course of groping blindly beneath my lowboy in search of a missing tuppence, I chanced upon an old folio of my notes which had been lost to, these many years! I immediately squatted back upon my heels to peruse it, the years and my tuppence instantly forgotten. And there, in my own scabbled hand, I read the delineation of the early cases in which Homes and I had been involved.

One such period of inactivity, it appeared, had occurred in the year '29, and had been all the worse for having followed upon the solution of a problem which had been exceptionally challenging. At the request of the Moroccan government,

Homes had spent the summer in North Africa tracing down an illicit cinema theatre which had been inciting the natives to revolt through the presentation of inflammatory films.

With his usual brilliant display of genius, Homes had eventually managed to trace the plot to an ex-German adventurer known as "Sahara" Bernhardt; the illegal theatre—called "The Desert Fox"—he had personally located and destroyed. Naturally, after such excitement, the dullness of a damp London autumn lay particularly heavy upon him, especially since there seemed to be no immediate clientele for his exceptional analytical powers.

On this particular day, however—a gray, rainy afternoon in October, as I recall—I returned from my medical rounds to find Homes a changed man. Where I had left him dull-eyed and bored, I returned to find him pacing the floor in barely concealed excitement, his eyes alive and dancing once again. At sight of me he smiled his old smile and extended a telegraph form in my direction.

"A message from my brother Criscoft, Watney!" he exclaimed. "He has urgent need of my services. At last my ennui shall end!"

I nodded in delighted satisfaction. Criscoft Homes, whose position in the Foreign Office was a bit difficult to define, was not only Homes's sole relative, but also by far his favorite. Many a time we had visited him at his club, where he usually sat alone contemplating his Naval responsibilities or some other weighty military problem. For him to request aid of Homes was a sure indication of an interesting problem.

I reached for the telegraph form, but before I could take it there came the sound of footsteps upon the stairs, and a moment later Criscoft himself had entered the room, crossed it to shake our hands fervently, and in almost the same motion flung himself into a chair by the fireplace, frowning at us both. A moment later he spoke.

"I hope you are free, Schlock," said he heavily, and leaned forward as if the comfort of his accommodation was somehow alien to the seriousness of his mission.

"Free? I have never been more free!" Homes dropped into a chair across from his brother and looked at him with gleaming eyes. "What is the problem?"

For several moments Criscoft did not answer. He cast his eyes towards the sideboard as if searching for words. I

hastened to prepare libations even as I covertly studied the two men. I could not help but note, as I muddled the mixtures, the startling resemblance between the two brothers despite their great differences in height, weight, colouring, facial features, and general appearance. In silence I served them and then retired to one side to listen.

For a moment Criscroft fingered his drink in thoughtful quietude and then, quaffing deeply, set his glass reluctantly to one side.

"Are you acquainted with Lord Fynch-fframis?" he asked at last.

"The noted financier? Only by name," Homes replied.

"I am afraid you will never know him in any other manner," Criscroft said sadly. "He is dead, and a certain Silas Weatherbeaten, an American, is being held in custody at Bow Street on suspicion of his murder."

"Weatherbeaten? The American financial genius?"

"None other. And, I might mention, the colonial denies any part in the sinister affair. His Embassy has been around to us, and we are put in the position where we must either prove his complicity or release him at once. Needless to say, relations between our great

country and theirs could become strained were we to make a mistake in this matter, and for this reason I wish to enlist your aid."

"Give me the details," Homes said simply.

"Of course. Well, the story is this: Lord Fynch-fframis either fell, jumped, or was pushed from his offices on top of the Exchange this morning at 9:45 A.M. At the time of the unfortunate occurrence, the only one present with him in his office was this same Silas Weatherbeaten. The American's story is that the two men had been talking when Fynch-fframis walked to the stock ticker in one corner, after which he gasped, turned pale, wiped his forehead and then, with no further ado, flung himself headlong through the window."

"The stock ticker? What is that?" asked Homes.

"I have no idea. I am merely repeating Weatherbeaten's words."

"No matter. It can scarcely concern us where the man walked just prior to the plunge. Pray continue."

"Well, Schlock, since there were no other witnesses, we have only Weatherbeaten's story to go on. Scotland Yard has been unable to uncover any history of previous enmity

between the two men; but on the other hand they have also been unable to establish the slightest reason for Fynch-fframis to take his own life. As you can well imagine, the situation leaves us in the Foreign Office in a serious dilemma."

"I understand. And that's all you have to give me?"

"All except this," Criscroft paused to delve into a pocket, sorted through the conglomeration he extracted, and finally came up with a thin slip of paper. "When Lord Fynch-fframis was picked up, he was found to be clutching this strip of paper. To the best of our knowledge it represents a code, and a code so devilishly complicated that to this moment Department M5 has had no success at all in solving it."

At these words Homes's eyes glittered feverishly and he reached forward with eagerness, taking the slip from his brother's fingers and bending forward to peruse it intently. At the frown that appeared on his face I stepped behind him and read the puzzling message over his shoulder. It was neatly printed on a thin strip of yellowish paper and I reproduce the mysterious hieroglyphics for the reader's inspection:

... T-T 7½ ... AllAf
44 ... AlRs 12 ... G&F

11 ... T-T 7 ... AllAf
43 ... AlRs 11½ ... G&F
10 5/8 ... T-T 6
5/8 ... AllAf 42 ... AlRs
11 ... G&F 10 ... T-T
6½ ...

"Well?" The harshness of Criscroft's voice betrayed his anxiety. "Can you make anything of it?"

Homes remained in a brown study, his eyes scanning the strange message. Then he raised his head slowly, a curious expression on his face. "At the moment, no," he said slowly. "It bears no resemblance to any other code or cipher I have ever seen."

Criscroft drew himself to his feet and stared down at his brother. "I am sure you have solved more difficult ones, Schlock," he said at last. "You are aware of the urgency of this matter. Should you require me, I shall be available at any time. A messenger can reach me at my club."

"Good." Homes came to his feet, extending his hand. "Be sure I shall get right to it!"

Once Criscroft had left the premises, Homes fell back into his chair, staring at the mysterious message with a fierce scowl upon his face, while I studied it over his shoulder. Suddenly a possible solution occurred to me.

"Homes!" I cried. "These odd figures could well represent street addresses! 'T-T' could stand for Tottenham Towers, and 'G&F' might well be the corner of Grantham and Fro-bisher Streets."

He shook his head slowly, his eyes never leaving the message. "I doubt it, Watney. I am familiar with Tottenham Towers and as far as I know the apartment numbers run evenly. I cannot recall any Apartment 7½."

I attempted to bring to mind the numbering system at the famous Towers, but to no avail. Homes turned to his shelf of reference volumes and, selecting one, he swiftly became lost in its pages. I waited patiently until, some moments later, he flung it from him with a barely concealed curse.

"Useless!" he muttered, almost in anger, and returned once again to his fruitless study of the flimsy slip of paper. At length he raised his eyes to me.

"I fear my recent spell of inactivity has dulled my brain, Watney," he said sadly.

"Never!" I protested as loyally as I could.

Despite his preoccupation, a faint twinkle had come into his fine eyes. "Or possibly it is simply that I am no longer used to labour," he said. "If labour is the answer, however, time can

handle that." And drawing his chair to the table he began the series of permutations necessary to decoding the thin strip.

Dinnertime came, but Homes worked on. Our house-keeper, Mrs. Essex, was on holiday and I suggested that Homes join me at a nearby restaurant, but he refused. And when I left to eat, it was to leave him still at it, frozen in his chair, his eyes poring intently over the thin yellow slip, and his thin fingers racing across his scratch-sheets...

I dined leisurely, knowing that when Homes was involved in a problem he did not particularly appreciate my presence. I had a brandy and cigar, and then walked slowly back to our quarters. I mounted the staircase and entered the room to find Homes in conference with a ragged street urchin. The lad, of mixed Chinese-Israeli parentage, was known as Matzo-Tung and was the leader of the Bagel Street Regulars.

Together with Homes the boy was bent over a large street-map of the city, and as I entered both raised their eyes to me. I was shocked by the haggard expression on Homes's face; it was apparent that he had not paused for refreshment since I had left.

"Good evening," I said

brightly, attempting to instill some cheer in the atmosphere.

"Are you any forrader?"

Homes shook his head dispiritedly. "No, Watney," he said wearily. "I am reduced to clutching at straws. I have exhausted all other possibilities and am compelled to accept your suggestion that these strange hieroglyphics refer to street addresses indeed. The Bagel Street Regulars will check them out for me. Should this last lead be barren, I fear I shall be forced to confess failure!" With a sigh he turned to the young ragamuffin.

"Your instructions are clear?"

"Raht, Guv'nor."

"One lad to each address," Homes said sternly, "and the name of the tenant back here as quickly as possible."

"Raht, Guv'nor," said the lad and moved to the door.

"And mind the stairs," I said absently as he reached for the knob.

"The apples? I'll take 'em cheesy, Guv'nor."

He started to turn the knob, then paused with an odd expression on his face, and I saw he was staring over my shoulder at Homes. I turned and to my amazement I saw that my friend was waving his hands frantically, his face distorted. I hurried to his side.

"Homes!" I cried anxiously. "Are you all right?"

"All right? I am a fool! What a fool I am! You, lad! Forget your errand! And here's a shilling for your trouble!"

Homes turned to me, all traces of weariness fled from his face, as the puzzled street urchin took the coin and slipped down the steps. "Watney! One moment while I change to proper clothing and we are off to visit my brother. How stupid I have been!"

And with no further comment he dashed from the room, removing his dressing gown as he went.

I waited in mystified silence until, a few moments later, he emerged from his room straightening his weskit, and a second later I found myself being propelled down the stairway. Homes waved a passing hansom to the curb and hustled me inside.

"Homes!" I cried, tugging my arm free and straightening the fabric. "You have discovered the answer to this problem?"

"I have indeed!" My friend leaned back and patted his coat pocket where the mysterious strip of paper now lay. His eyes gleamed. "But I do not apologize for my delay, for it followed none of the normal, or even abnormal, rules of cryptography. And why?" His eyes

twinkled. "Because it was never meant to be a code!"

Before I could ask an explanation of this strange statement, his eyes went to his timepiece and then to the man on the box. "Driver! A shilling bonus if you have us in Curzon Street in eight minutes!"

We came flying down Park Lane, turned precariously into Curzon Street with squealing wheel hubs, and seconds later the driver was hauling desperately upon the reins as we approached the club of which Criscroft Homes was a member. Homes was on the pavement before we had come to a halt, had paid the driver, and was pulling me impatiently up the broad stone steps of the club.

He brushed past the doorman, nodded distantly to the cloakroom attendant, and turned into the library where, in one corner, Criscroft sat moodily. At the commotion our entrance provoked, he came to his feet and hurried forward as quietly as he could.

"Schlock," he said in a low whisper, obviously torn between the club rules for silence and his necessity for our information. He glanced about. "Not here. Come!"

He drew us hastily from the room, led us through a series of narrow corridors, until we found the kitchen. There he

ensconced us on hard chairs, seated himself, and spoke in a normal tone of voice.

"Sorry," he said quietly, and then added in more anxious tones, "Do you bring me the news I have been awaiting? Are you able to help me resolve my desperate dilemma?"

"I am," Homes replied with quiet triumph. He leaned forward, narrowly avoiding a scalding teapot. "There is but one bit of information I require in order to complete my case. Am I correct in assuming that Lord Fynch-fframis originally came from common stock? That he was, as a matter of fact, born within the decibel range of the Bow Bells?"

We both stared at him in amazement.

"That is true," Criscroft said at last, staring hard at his brother. "Although how you ever managed to deduce it remains a mystery to me! It was knowledge that was kept secret even from Debrett's. I only obtained the true facts myself, less than an hour ago." He leaned forward, a querying frown upon his face. "But how can this information possibly aid you?"

Homes smiled. "You shall soon see." His smile faded, to be replaced with a most serious expression. "The important thing is that you may now, with

a clear conscience, free Mr. Silas Weatherbeaten. He was but an innocent spectator to this tragic affair."

Criscroft's eyes widened. "You can prove this?"

"I can." Without further ado, Homes reached into his pocket and produced the mysterious strip of paper. Brushing aside some crumbs, he spread it out upon a nearby breadboard. His strong, thin fingers pointed to the words while his tone assumed that degree of pedantic superiority which was so usual with him when he was explaining the successful solution to a case.

"When first I saw this queer admixture of letters and numerals," said he, his eyes fixed upon us both intently, "I attempted to solve it through the standard methods of cryptology, as well as through the application of certain mathematical formulæ which I have been fortunate enough to develop personally. All my efforts—I can now freely admit—were without success. Then, in desperation, I was about to send young Matzo-Tung out on what would have proven to be a futile quest, when he happened to use a phrase that immediately clarified the entire affair to me. A moment's thought and the picture was clear!"

"But, Homes," I protested, "I heard every word the young lad spoke, and I can see nothing in his words that could aid in the solution of this problem."

"Watney, you hear with your ears rather than with your intelligence," Homes replied cryptically. "Do you not recall the young boy saying, 'The apples? I'll take 'em cheesy, Guv'nor?'" His mimicry was remarkable as he duplicated exactly the heavy Cockney accent of the street urchin.

I stared at him in amazement. "But how could that possibly help, Homes?"

"He was using Cockney rhyming slang, Watney!"

"Cockney rhyming slang?"

"Precisely!" He laughed at my blank expression. "I can see that you are not familiar with the Cockney, Watney. He chooses many ways in which to express himself, and the most famous, of course, is his rhyming slang. In order to state a word, he chooses a phrase of which the final word rhymes with the word he is attempting to express. For example, the Cockney will say 'storm and strife,' when he wishes to say 'wife.' And many of them, with time, have come to even leave off the last part of the phrase, so that 'storm' becomes 'wife.'"

I stared at him. His eyes twinkled.

"Yes, Watney! Take our little ragamuffin this evening, for instance. 'Apples,' of course, is from the Cockney phrase of 'apples and pears,' which means 'stairs.' 'Cheesy' means 'easy.' He was simply assuring you that he would go down the steps with care."

His face sobered. "The moment he spoke I saw all. The mysterious message became crystal clear. Come, let me demonstrate."

His fingers slid along the lines of the strange message.

"'T-T' can only be 'Tit-for-Tat'—or 'hat.' 'AllAf' is 'All Afloat'—or 'coat.' 'AIRs' is the famous 'Almond Rocks' that the Cockney uses to refer to his socks. And 'G&F' can only be 'Greens-and-Fruits' with which he designates his boots."

"Hat?" I asked, completely mystified. "Coat? Socks? Boots?"

"Exactly!"

"But the numbers, Homes," I said in bewilderment. "What significance can they possibly have?"

"Sizes, of course," Homes replied quietly.

We stared at him, considering his startling deduction. At last Criscroft cleared his throat and spoke. "But, Schlock—the numbers are continually decreasing."

"Precisely! And that is the

answer!" The great detective's eyes gleamed; his deep voice became even deeper. "*The poor man was wasting away!* In all probability from some incurable disease. He was not wiping his brow when Weatherbeaten saw him this morning; he was undoubtedly trying to check the progress of his dread condition. And when he saw that it had not abated, but had even increased in tempo, he knew there was truly no hope for him, and that death was to be preferred to waiting until he was, quite literally, a shadow of his former self."

Words failed both Criscroft and myself at this remarkable demonstration of Homes's extraordinary reasoning powers. Impulsively I thrust out my hand in heartfelt congratulations.

"Magnificent, Homes!" I exclaimed, overcome with admiration.

Criscroft arose with shining eyes and placed his arms about his younger brother's shoulders in a demonstration of affection quite rare for a Foreign Office personality.

"Schlock, you may well have saved England another *cause celebre*," said he solemnly, and brushed the hint of a tear from his cheek.

Homes shook his head modestly. "Do not thank me,"

he said quietly. "Thank the Bagel Street Regulars, or even Lord Fynch-fframis himself. It was his unconscious reversion to his childhood language when faced with a crisis that solved this case, not me."

"Nonsense!" Criscroft replied roundly. He cast his eyes about. "This calls for a drink. Cook!"

The following morning I was in the process of simultaneously attempting to reach for my brussels sprouts juice and open the morning journal, when Homes entered our breakfast room. He nodded to me pleasantly and drew up a chair.

Knowing my friend's desire for the news as quickly as possible, I forewent my vegetable tonic and spread the newspaper to its fullest. Black ink in profusion sprang to my eye; it took a second or two until the full import of the startling headlines registered upon my brain.

Homes had been reaching indolently for his napkin; at the sight of the horrified expression upon my face he paused, considering me wonderingly.

"Something that might be of interest to us, Watney?"

"Homes!" I cried, unfolding the journal further, and then doubling it to present him with the scarelines. "Look! The stock market has crashed!"

For a moment he hesitated and then, after careful consideration, he completed the maneuver of placing his napkin in his lap. His fine eyes were warm with sympathy as he replied.

"Well," said he softly, "there is one consolation. At least poor Lord Fynch-fframis was spared the added pain of seeing his life's savings swept away in the holocaust."

I stared at him, a wave of admiration for his understanding flooding me.

"True," I said, and turned the page.



Michael Gilbert

C12: Department of Bank Robberies

A short novel, complete in this anthology, of police procedure, English style, about a new Scotland Yard Department called C12—a department especially formed and organized to investigate a startling epidemic of bank robberies. And—still strictly procedural, you understand—about Jane Orfrey, the kind of girl who smiled with the whole of her face . . . Here is a blend of the detective-documentary and the adventure-thriller in the best school of contemporary British crime writing . . .

Detective: INSPECTOR PATRICK PETRELLA

The drill screamed as it bit into the tough metal. The operator, a small man with a sad monkey-face, hummed to himself as he worked. It was the last of eight holes which he was boring, four on either side of the hinge of the strongroom door.

When he had finished the drilling, and had checked, with a thermometer, that the surrounding metal had returned to a safe temperature, he filled each of the holes with Polar Ammon gelatine dynamite, tamping the putty-like stuff delicately home with the blunt

end of a pencil; then he used the sharp end to bore a hole in the middle deep enough to take the tube of the copper electric detonator with its plastic-covered lead of tinned iron.

When all the detonators were in, he collected the eight ends, bared them, twisted them together, and covered the joint with insulating tape. Then he collected a pile of old army blankets and, helped now by a second man, draped them from wires which had already been fixed across the door.

Both men then retreated to the guard door—at the entrance—

of the strongroom lobby. Two of the bars had been cut out. They squeezed through the gaps, dragging the plastic-covered lead behind them.

In the farthest corner of the outer lobby stood an ordinary six-volt car battery. The first man separated the lead wires and twisted one of them round the negative terminals.

Both men squatted down, backs against the wall, heads bent forward.

Then the second wire, carefully held in a rubber-gloved hand, was laid on the positive terminal. The shock wave of the explosion pinned them against the wall.

The third man, standing in the doorway of a shop outside, heard the crump of the explosion and swore softly to himself. The next ten minutes were going to be the most difficult.

A newsagent, sleeping four houses away on the opposite side of the street, sat up in bed, and said, "Cor, what was that? Have they declared war?" His wife said, "Wassup?" "Sounded like a bomb." "So what?" said his wife. "It hasn't hit us." She dragged him down into bed again.

Eight minutes. Nine minutes. Ten minutes. Eleven minutes. *What the hell are they playing at?* Twelve minutes.

The door of the shop opened and two men appeared. Both had heavy satchels slung over their shoulders. One carried the drill, another had the electric cutter which had been used to saw through the bars.

The third man relieved them of drill and cutter and set off at a brisk pace up the street to where the car was parked. Not a word had been spoken from first to last.

Police Constable Owens, of the Gravesend Police, saw the car nosing into the street. He thought it odd that it should have no lights on, and held up a hand to stop it.

The car accelerated. Owens jumped, slipped, and fell into the gutter. He picked himself up in time to see the car corner and disappear.

Police Constable Owens limped to the nearest police box.

A pigeon took off from Boadicea's helmet and went into a power dive. It was aimed at the head of a young man with a brown face and black hair, who had just crossed Westminster Bridge. Detective Inspector Patrick Petrella raised his arm. The pigeon executed a sideslip and volplaned off up into a tree. Petrella regarded the pigeon without malice.

It was a beautiful day. It was

spring. He was starting a new job.

The message which had reached him at Gabriel Street Police Station had not been explicit, but he guessed that his spell of duty in South London was over. It had spanned three years; and he had enjoyed most of it, but three years in one place was enough.

He pushed his hat a little farther back on his head, and swung in under the Archway and up the three shallow steps into the main building of New Scotland Yard.

The private secretary, a serious young man in horn-rimmed glasses, inspected him as he came into the anteroom, and then said, "The A.C.'s ready for you. Will you go in?"

Petrella found himself straightening his shoulders as he marched by the inner door into the presence of Sir Wilfred Romer, Assistant-Commissioner in charge of the Criminal Investigation Branch of the Metropolitan Police, and—in Petrella's humble opinion—the greatest thief catcher since Wensley.

"Sit down," said Romer. "You know Superintendent Baldwin, I think."

Petrella nodded to Superintendent Baldwin, big, red-faced, conscientiously ferocious, known to everyone from

the newest recruit upward as Baldy.

Romer said, "I'm forming a new Department. It'll be known as C12. And, broadly speaking"—here his face split in a wintry smile—"you're the Department."

Petrella managed to smile back.

"You'll have two or three people to help you, but the smaller you keep it, the happier I'll be. First, because we haven't got many spare hands, and secondly, because smallness means secrecy. Your first job will be the collection and analysis of information."

As Romer spoke, an alphabetical index of subjects, from Arson to Zoology on which this remarkable man might be seeking information, flipped through Petrella's aroused imagination.

"On bank robberies," concluded Romer.

"Yes, sir," said Petrella. "Bank robbery."

"Not bank robbery in general. It's a particular series of bank robberies—that's getting under our skin. Never mind the details now. You'll get those from Baldwin. What I wanted to tell you was this. There's one thing we're quite certain of: there's an organizer. I want him put away. That'll be your second job."

Back in his own office, Baldwin filled in a few details.

"The bumph's in these folders," he said. "It'll take you a day or two to wade through it all. It goes back about seven years. We didn't know that there was any link-up, not at first. The actual jobs are done by different outfits. All pro stuff. Chick Selling and his crowd have been involved. And Walter Hudd. And the Band brothers. We're fairly certain it was them who did the Central Bank at Gravesend last month. You probably read about it."

Petrella nodded. He had heard enough about high-class safebreakers to know that they left their signatures on their jobs as surely as great artists in other walks of life. He said, "What makes you so certain there's a link-up?"

"Three things." Baldwin ticked them off on the fingers of his big red hand. "First, they're getting absolutely accurate information. They've never taken a bank that wasn't stuffed with notes. And that isn't as common as you might think. You could open a lot of strongrooms and find nothing in them but Georgian silver and deed boxes.

"Second, the technique's the same. They always work from another building. Sometimes as much as three or four houses

away—that means slicing through a lot of brickwork. They've got proper tools for that too, and they use them properly. Someone's taught 'em.

"And last, but not least, someone's supplying them with equipment. It's good stuff—so good it can't even be bought in this country for a legitimate job. When Walter Hudd's boys cracked the Sheffield District Bank they had to cut and run and they left behind a high-speed film-cooled steel cutter that the London Salvage Corps have been asking for ever since they heard about it. It comes from Germany."

Later, installed in a small room on the top story of the Annex into which four desks had somehow been inserted, Petrella repeated much of this to his two aides. The first was Detective Sergeant Edwards, a solemn young man with the appearance and diction of a chartered accountant, who was reputed to be extremely efficient in the organization of paper work. The second—as Petrella was delighted to note—was none other than his old protégé, Detective Wilmot, from Highside.

"Who's the fourth?" said Petrella.

"We're getting a female clerical assistant," said Wilmot.

"I asked at the typing pool who it was going to be but no one seemed to know. I don't mind betting though, as we're the youngest department, we shall get the oldest and ugliest secretary. Someone like Mrs. Proctor, who's got buck teeth and something her best friends have got tired of telling her about. What do we do next?"

Petrella said, "No one really knows. We shall have to make most of it up as we go along. We've got to have the best possible liaison with the C.R.O. and the Information Room on the old jobs, and any new jobs that come along. Then we'll have to circularize all provincial police forces, asking for information on suspicious circumstances—"

"Such as?" asked Edwards.

"First thing, we might see if we can get the banks to improve the reward system. At present, you only collect the cash if your information leads to someone being arrested. That's not good enough. What happens at the moment is, someone hears a bang in the night. Might be something, might not. They go back to sleep again. If there was a reward—it needn't be a big one—say, fifty pounds for the first man getting on the blower to the police station, we might get some action.

"Next, we'll have to circularize local forces—for information about thefts of explosives, losses of strongroom keys, unexplained caches of notes, suspicious behavior near banks, bank employees with expensive tastes—"

"Bank managers with expensive mistresses."

"That'll be enough from you, Wilmot. Do you think you can draft us a circular?"

"Can do," said Edwards.

"The three of us will have to be on the priority warning list through the Information Room, and the police station nearest our home. We may be called out any hour of the day or night."

"I'll have to warn all my girl friends," said Wilmot.

That afternoon Petrella was sitting alone at his desk staring at the tips of his shoes when the door opened, a girl looked in, and said, "Are you C12?"

"That's right," said Petrella.

"You certainly took some finding. Nobody seemed to have ever heard of you."

"We're a very important Department. But very hush-hush."

"They haven't given you much of a room. My name's Orfrey, by the way."

"I can't help feeling," said Petrella, "that, as we shall be working together for an in-

definite period in a space measuring not more than twelve feet by ten, I shall find myself addressing you, sooner or later, by your Christian name."

Miss Orfrey smiled. Petrella noticed that, when she smiled, she smiled with the whole of her face, crinkling up her eyes, parting her lips, and showing small, even white teeth.

"That name's Jane," she said...

About a week later Jane Orfrey said to Wilmot, "Is he always as serious as this?"

"He's got a lot on his mind," said Wilmot.

"He might smile sometimes."

"It's make or break, really," said Wilmot. "If we sort out this lot, he gets the credit. If we don't, he gets a great big black mark."

"It doesn't seem to be worrying you."

"Paper work doesn't mean a lot to me. I'm what you might call a man of action. What about coming to the pictures tonight?"

"Thank you," said Jane. "I'm going to take some of this paper home."

"It's a serious matter, sir," said Sergeant Edwards.

"What is?" said Petrella, coming up from the depths of his thoughts on the technical

construction of strongroom doors.

"Our allowances."

"What about them?"

"Now that we're working at Scotland Yard and on a special job, we ought to get a Special Service increment *and* a Central London increment. But the regulations say that where you're entitled to both, you can have the whole of whichever allowance you select, and fifty per cent of the other one. I've been working it out—"

"And I thought you were doing something useful," said Petrella.

Sergeant Edwards looked aggrieved...

Two o'clock on a Monday morning, twelve inches away from Petrella's ear, the telephone screamed. He jerked upright, hit his head against the back of the bed, swore, and snatched the receiver off the instrument.

"Job at Slough," said a courteous and offensively wide-awake voice. "They've pulled in the men involved: Ronald, Kenneth, and Leslie Band. There'll be a car round for you in three minutes."

Petrella was still trying to button his shirt when he heard the car draw up. He finished his dressing sitting beside the driver as they sped along the empty

roads toward Slough. The driver didn't seem to be pressing, but Petrella noticed the speedometer needle steady on the seventy mark. At that moment a motorcycle passed them, and he just had time to recognize Wilmot.

Inspector Lansell, of the Buckinghamshire C.I.D., was waiting for them in his office.

"It was the North Midland Bank," he said. "They cut their way through from the cellar of an empty shop next door. Must have started some time on Saturday afternoon. Took all Saturday night and Sunday over the job. Blew the main strongroom door at half past one this morning. A chap living across the street heard it, and telephoned us. We had a patrol car a few streets away, and we got them as they came out."

"Good work," said Petrella. "I'll have a word with them now, if I may."

"They're all yours," said Lansell courteously.

The Band brothers were small, quiet, brown-faced men, all with good records of regular service in the Royal Engineers. By six o'clock Petrella had got what he could out of them. It wasn't a lot. They had all been in the hands of the police before, and they answered, blocked, or evaded the routine questions.

Petrella had hardly expected more, and was not depressed. He was particularly interested in two pieces of their equipment: a high-speed electric drill with an adjustable tungsten-tipped angle bit which had been used to drill a series of holes down either side of the hinge of the strongroom door; and an oxyacetylene, white flame cutter, coupled with a small pumping device which stepped up the pressure and temperature of the flame.

Both were in ex-works condition. The cutter had initials and a number stamped on the base. It looked like shipyard equipment. There was a department in the Board of Trade which would probably be able to identify it for him. If it had been imported under license, it could be traced back to its maker.

Petrella had another reason for feeling pleased. The banks, some of which had jibbed at his automatic alarm-reward system, would probably support it now that it had shown results.

He said to Inspector Lansell, "Any idea where my Sergeant is?"

"Haven't seen him," said Lansell. "I'll ask."

But no one in the station had seen him. Petrella traveled back to London on a train, crowded with coughing and

sneezing commuters. He remembered the ice patches on the road and a nagging feeling of uneasiness traveled with him.

In the course of that morning he rang Information three times. No accidents to police officers had been reported.

At two o'clock Wilmot arrived, unshaven but unrepentant.

"I've got a feeling," he said—before Petrella could open his mouth—"that maybe we're onto something. It was a turn up for the book. I stopped just short of the High Street to ask the way to the station, and I saw these two in an all-night café over the way having a cuppa; and I said, Oh, oh, what are *they* doing?"

"Take a deep breath," said Petrella, "and start again. You saw who?"

"Morris Franks and his brother Sammy."

"That pair," said Petrella, with distaste. "What do you imagine they were doing in Slough at three o'clock in the morning?"

"Just exactly what I said to myself. I said, Here's the Band of Brothers robbing a bank—and here's two of the nastiest bits of work that ever come out of Whitechapel sitting in a café, two streets away from the scene of the crime, drinking tea.

This'll stand looking into. So I parked my bike—I reckoned you could get on for a bit without me—"

"Thank you."

"—and I hung around . . . for hours and hours. They must've got through twelve cups of tea, each. Just before seven o'clock they come out and took a train back to Paddington. I went with 'em. At Paddington they got on the Metropolitan, got off at Kings Cross, and walked towards the Angel. There were quite a few people about by that time. I don't think they spotted me."

Petrella was prepared to believe that. Wilmot's urchin figure would have melted as effectively into the background of Kings Cross as any animal into its native jungle.

"They fetched up at a big builder's yard in Arblay Street. Jerry Light and Company. They walked straight in."

"Do you think they work there?"

"It looked like it. But that wasn't all. I hung round for a bit. Half a dozen others went in. I recognized one of them. It was Stoker. Remember him?"

"Albert Stoker," said Petrella. "Yes. I remember him. He tried to kick my teeth in when I was up at Highside. He was working with Boot Howton and the Camden Town boys."

"If they're all like that," said Wilmot, "they're First Division stuff."

"Mr. Jerry Light would bear looking into," agreed Petrella.

That afternoon Petrella paid a visit to Arblay Street. Jerry Light's establishment occupied most of the north side. It was the sort of place that only London could have produced. What was originally an open space between two buildings had been filled, in the passage of time, with a clutter of smaller buildings, miscellaneous huts, sheds, and lean-to's, on top of, or propped up against, each other. Such space as remained was stacked with bricks, tiles, window frames, chimney pots, kitchen sinks, lavatory bowls, doors, pipes, and cisterns. An outside flight of steps lifted itself above the cluster to a door at first-story level which was labeled, MR. J. LIGHT.

As he watched, this door opened and a man came out. He was a very large man, with a cropped head, red face, and closely clipped mustache. A thick neck rose from magnificent shoulders and chest. It was a Sergeant-Major's figure—the sort of figure which time, and inertia, would play tricks on, reversing the chest and the stomach as inevitably as sand reverses itself in an hour-glass.

But it had not done so yet. Mr. Jerry Light was, he judged, not more than 45 and his eyes were still sharp as he stood surveying his cluttered kingdom.

Petrella walked away.

Back at Scotland Yard he said to Edwards, "See if Records has anything on a Mr. Jerry Light. He runs a builder's yard at Islington. Wilmot, I think it'd be a good idea if you went along and asked for a job."

"Suppose Stoker recognizes me? I had a bit of trouble with him myself at Highside, remember?"

"I'm counting on Stoker recognizing you. Then if you're still given the job, it'll prove that Light's honest. If you don't get it, the chances are the outfit's crooked."

"Suppose they drop a chimney on me!"

"Then we shall know they're dishonest," said Petrella. He had little fear for Wilmot. He was extremely well equipped to look after himself...

Edwards was the first to report.

He said, "Gerald Abraham Light. He has got a record. In 1951 he was sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment at the Exeter autumn assizes for waylaying and assaulting the manager of the Exeter branch of the District Bank."

"Robbery?"

"Not robbing, sir. Assaulting. They knocked two of his teeth out, kicked in his ribs, and broke an arm."

"They?"

"There was another man. Alwyn Corder. He got twelve months too."

"Why did they do it?"

"No motive was suggested at all. Mr. Justice Arbuthnot, in his summing-up, called it, 'a particularly cowardly and senseless assault.'"

Petrella's mind wasn't on Mr. Justice Arbuthnot. He had experienced a very faint, almost undetectable tremor of excitement—like that of a patient angler near whose bait a fish had swum, not seizing it but troubling it by his passage.

"Alwyn Corder," he said.

"It's not a common name. I could bear to know what he's doing today."

"If he's had any other convictions, he should be easy to trace," said Edwards. "Incidentally, Light hasn't. That's the only time he's ever stepped out of line."

"It's the only time he's ever been caught," said Petrella.

It was seven o'clock that evening before Wilmot returned. C12 kept irregular hours. Sergeant Edwards was filing some papers. Jane Orfrey

was filing her nails. Petrella was watching Jane Orfrey.

"Hired and fired," said Wilmot.

"To start with, it all went like love's old sweet song. Mr. Light said I was just the sort of young man he was looking for. Clean, healthy, and not afraid of work. He explained how he ran his outfit too. He works for big building contractors. Say one of them's doing a clearance job at Southend and wants extra help. Light sends a gang down. However many men he wants. Light takes a ten per cent cut of their wages. They reckon it's worthwhile, because he keeps 'em in regular work."

"What went wrong?"

"What went wrong was, just as I was about to sign on, in comes Stoker."

"What happened?"

"It was a bit of an awkward moment, actually. Stoker went bright pink, and said he'd like a word outside with Mr. Light. So they stepped outside, shut the door, and I heard 'em yawing. Then Mr. Light came back and said, very polite, that he hadn't got a vacancy right now, but he'd let me know if he had one. So I scarpered—keeping my chin on my shoulder, in case anyone tried to start anything."

"Lucky they didn't."

"I'll say it was lucky," said Wilmot. "Because if they had

started anything, they might have spoiled this."

He took a handkerchief out of his side pocket and unwrapped it carefully. Inside was a lump of cobbler's wax. Impressed in the wax was the outline of a key.

"The key was on the inside of the door," said Wilmot. "I got it out while they were talking. Nice impression, isn't it? I know a little man who'll make it for us while we wait."

Petrella said, "Are you suggesting that we break into this office?"

"That's right."

"You realize that we should be breaking practically every rule in the Metropolitan Police Code?"

"That's right."

"And if we're caught we shall both be sacked."

"That's why I'm not planning to get caught, personally," said Wilmot.

It was half an hour after midnight when they backed the little van into the passageway behind Light's yard. A veil of drizzling rain had cut down visibility to a few yards.

"Perfect night for crime," said Wilmot. "You hold the ladder. I'll go first. I think I saw some broken bottle on the top of this wall."

Petrella gave him a minute's

start, then followed. Negotiated with care, the ragged *cheveux-de-frise* presented little obstacle. Petrella let himself down on the other side, and Wilmot's hand grabbed his foot and steered it onto an upended cistern.

Five minutes later they were in Jerry Light's office, carefully fastening the blanket Wilmot had brought with him over the only window. Petrella then turned on his lantern torch and stood it on the floor.

"Better get cracking," he said. "It looks like a lot of work."

One closet contained box files full of bills, invoices, and trade correspondence. Another was devoted to builders' catalogues, price lists, and samples mixed with old telephone and street directories, technical publications, and an astonishing collection of paperback novels. The desk was full of mixed correspondence and bills. The safe in the corner was locked.

Three hours of hard work convinced Petrella that Light had a perfectly genuine business.

"There's only one thing here I don't quite understand," he said. "Why should he bother to keep a seven-year-old diary in the top drawer of his desk? Anything you kept close at hand like that you'd expect to be important, wouldn't you?"

"Probably forgot to throw it away."

"But why keep a seven-year-old one, and throw away the other six?"

Wilmot came across to have a look.

"There's something else odd about it too," said Petrella. "Do you see?"

Wilmot focused his torch on the open book and studied it.

"Doesn't seem to mean a lot," he said. "There's something written on each page. Sort of shorthand. Perhaps it's business appointments."

"That's what I thought at first. But would he have business appointments on Sunday too?"

"Doesn't seem likely," agreed Wilmot. "What are you going to do?"

"We can't take it away. If it's important, he's bound to miss it. We'll have to photograph it." He produced from his coat pocket a small black box. "We'll prop it up on the desk. Shine your torch on it, and turn each page when I say."

It took them an hour to finish the job, replace the book, and tidy up.

"If there's anything important," said Petrella, "it's in the safe. I'm afraid that's beyond us."

"You never know," said Wilmot. "I found this key in

that closet. It's just the sort of place people do hide their safe keys. See if it fits."

Petrella took the key, inserted it in the lock, and exerted pressure. There was a tiny sensation of prickling in his fingers, and the key turned.

"Nice work," said Wilmot. "Let's see what he keeps in the old strongbox. Hello! What is it? Something wrong?"

Petrella had relocked the safe. Now he walked across and replaced the key in the closet. He did this without haste, but without loss of time.

"We're getting out of here," he said. "That safe's wired to an alarm. I set it off when I turned the key."

He picked up the torch from the floor and made a careful tour of the room. There wasn't a great deal to do. But it took time.

"All right," Petrella said at last. "When I turn out the torch, get the blanket down."

"Nick of time," said Wilmot. They could both hear the car coming...

As they locked the office door behind them and went down the steps into the yard, headlights swiveled round the corner throwing the main gate into relief. Brakes screamed; a car door slammed; a voice started giving orders.

Wilmot lay across the wall,

leaned down, and pulled Petrella up beside him. There was no time for finesse. Petrella heard the cloth of his trousers rip on the broken glass as he swung his legs across, felt a stinging pain in his thigh, and the warm rush of blood down his leg.

Then he was following Wilmot down the ladder. As he reached the ground, Wilmot's hand grabbed his arm.

Footsteps were echoing along the pavement.

Wilmot put his mouth close to Petrella's ear. "They've sent someone round the back," he said. "I'll have to fix him."

Petrella nodded. The blood was running into his shoe.

Wilmot crouched, pressed against the wall. The dim form of a man appeared at the mouth of the passage and came on, unsuspecting. Wilmot straightened up, and hit him, once, from below, at the exact point where trousers and shirt joined.

The man said something which sounded like "Aaargh," and folded forward onto his knees. As Wilmot and Petrella picked their way past him, he was still fighting for breath.

"What are these?" said Jane Orfrey.

"They're ten-magnification enlargements of microfilm shots of the pages in a seven-year-old desk diary."

"But what do they mean?"

"If I knew that," said Petrella, "I'd know whether I risked my professional career last night for something or for nothing. I want you to go through every entry. I expect it's a code—the homemade sort that's so damned difficult to decipher—where U.J. can mean Uncle Jimmy, Ursula Jeans, and the Union Jack. You'll need a lot of patience with it."

Jane said, "We got something useful this morning. Do you remember Mallindales? The installment buying house. It was in answer to one of our circulars about marked and series notes."

There were two things, thought Petrella, about Jane Orfrey. The first was that she said *we* quite naturally, identifying herself as a member of the outfit. The other was that she had carried out every job she had been given without once saying, "I'm only here to type letters." He wondered, not for the first time, how they had been lucky enough to get her.

"You're not listening to a word I'm saying."

"I'm sorry," said Petrella. "We've had a lot of answers in to that particular inquiry."

"Mallindales told us they had a special stamp which they used on all their banknotes. Remember? The point about it

was that it didn't appear to mark the notes at all. But if you held one of them flat, and looked across it in an oblique light, you'd see the letters MD."

"I remember now," said Petrella. "They'd paid in a couple of hundred marked notes the day before the Maritime Bank at Liverpool was broken open. They thought we might locate some of them, because the thieves wouldn't realize they were marked."

"We have located one. It turned up yesterday, in the possession of a character called Looney Bell. He's a small-time thief, who was picked up by the Highside police for illicit door-to-door collection."

"And this was part of the money he'd collected?"

"That's right. The only person—he says—who gave him a banknote was, the local parson."

Petrella considered the matter. A clergyman who gave away pound notes to strangers who came to the door sounded like an unusual character.

"He might be worth looking into."

"Wilmot's looking into him now."

"He's cracked," reported Wilmot, when he came back after tea. "He tried to give me a pound. He said I looked like a very nice young man."

"Who is he?"

"The Reverend Mortleman, Vicar of St. John at Patmos, Crouch End. When I'd convinced him that I was a police officer and not a Good Cause, he spun me a yarn about a party who gave him money to give to the deserving poor. Some old girl with more money than sense, who knew Mortleman when he was an assistant clergyman at St. Barnabas, Pont Street, I gather. He wouldn't tell me her name."

"That sounds plausible," said Petrella. "A lot of rich people go to St. Barnabas. One of them might be sending him money for his local charities."

"I could probably find out who it was if I made a few inquiries."

Petrella considered the matter. He had to be careful not to disperse the efforts of his small force by chasing red herrings. "Let it stop there for the moment," he said. "I'll get the local boys to watch out. If they find any more of these MD notes circulating in those parts, we'll reconsider."

The next MD note arrived from quite a different source. A waiter at the Homburg-Carlton, going home in the early hours of the morning, started by accusing a taxi driver of overcharging him, then as-

saulted him, and finished up in custody. The station sergeant, checking his belongings before he was put into a cell, found three pound notes in his wallet, all marked with the Mallindales stamp, and brought them round personally to New Scotland Yard.

Petrella said, "Three of them together! That looks more like it. Where did he say he got them from?"

"He said they were his share of that evening's take."

"Then they must have come from someone dining at the Homburg. Good work, Sergeant. We'll follow it up."

Jane Orfrey spent the afternoon with the restaurant manager, and came back with a list of three public dinners, five private dinners, and thynames of the 84 people who had actually booked tables that night.

"It's impossible to identify their guests," she said. "And there were one or two people who came in without booking."

"It's not so bad," said Petrella. "Agreed, we can't do anything about the people who didn't book. But there weren't a lot of those. And why bother about the guests? Guests charge it to their bills. As for the big dinners, it's only the organizers of those who matter. A bit more work and we can boil this

down to quite a short list."

"Suppose we boil it down to twelve names," said the girl. "What do we do then? Go and ask them all if they know any bank robbers?"

Petrella looked at her curiously. "You need a break," he said. "You've been overworking."

Jane said stiffly, "It's the most interesting job I've ever done. I don't want to fall down on it, that's all."

"When we heard we were going to get a secretary," said Petrella, "I remember Wilmot said"—at this point, he remembered what Wilmot *had* said, and improvised rapidly—"As we're the youngest Department, we're bound to get the worst secretary.' I think we had a bit of luck there. I think we got the best."

"It's nice of you to say so."

"It must have been a slip-up in the typing pool. They'd earmarked someone like Mrs. Proctor for us, and they pulled the wrong card out of the filing cabinet."

"I don't think the typing pool had much say in the matter," said Jane. "I was posted here direct by Uncle Wilfred."

"Uncle Wilfred?"

"The Assistant Commissioner. He's my mother's elder brother."

"Good heavens," said Petrella, thinking back quickly over some of Wilmot's strictures on the top brass. "You might have told us sooner."

"You're the only person I have told," said Jane.

Petrella, looking at his watch, was surprised to see that it was nearly half past seven. He was on the point of saying "Let's go out and get something to eat," when it occurred to him that Jane might think he was asking her out because she was the Assistant Commissioner's niece.

He swallowed the words, and said, an abrupt, "Good night."

After he had gone, Jane sat for a whole minute staring at the closed door. Then she said out loud, "Silly cuckoo. You oughtn't to have told him. Now he's clammed up again."

When Petrella arrived at Scotland Yard on Monday morning, he could almost feel the thunder in the air. He went straight to Chief Superintendent Baldwin's office.

"You got my note?" said Baldwin.

"I didn't get any note," said Petrella, "but I heard the early morning news. It's not too good, is it?"

"It's damned bad," said Baldwin. "Two jobs on the same night. The Manchester one

was the biggest haul yet. What was really unfortunate was that the bank knew they were vulnerable—it was one of the payoff days for the Town Centre Reconstruction—and they'd asked the police to keep a special watch."

Petrella said, "How did they get in?"

"It was clever. One thing the police were on the lookout for was empty premises, near the bank. There weren't any. Just a block of offices, all let. The people who pulled this job must have planned it six months ago. That was when they took this office, two away from the bank. They cut through the wall, crossed the intervening office after it closed on Saturday, cut through the second wall, broke into the bank itself, and opened the strongroom some time on Sunday night. No one heard them. It isn't a residential area."

"What now?"

"Now," said Baldwin grimly, "the local force, prodded by the banks, are asking us to help, and when they say help, they mean something more than research and coordination."

"What did they have in mind?"

"Two or three mobile teams of special officers, working on the lines of the murder squad."

Petrella felt cold.

"That'll be quite an organization," he said. "I suppose we should be swallowed up in it."

Seeing his face, Baldwin laughed and said, "It may never happen. But it means we've got to get results, quick. How far have you got?"

It was a question Petrella found embarrassing to answer. It seemed pompous to say, "We're still analyzing information. You can't expect results until the analysis is complete." So he said, "We've one definite line. It may lead somewhere." He explained about Jerry Light.

"Do you think he runs the whole show?"

"I don't think so, no. My guess is that he runs the heavy mob. This organization has its own Flying Squad. When a job's being done, one or two of them will be on hand to get back the equipment, and collect the organizer's share of the loot."

"If that's so," said Baldwin, "there must be a link between Light and the head man."

"We're working on that angle," said Petrella. He thought it wiser not to say too much about the diary, or the circumstances in which it had come into their possession. "Another way would be to trace the equipment, from the factory. It would mean going over to West Germany."

"That could be fixed," said Baldwin. "We'd need a few days to make the arrangements. You'd go yourself. Do you talk any German?"

"Enough to get on with," said Petrella, in German.

When he got back to his room, he was tackled by Sergeant Edwards, with a worried face.

"You'd hardly think," he said, "that a man with an uncommon name like Alwyn Corder could disappear off the face of the earth, would you?"

So much had happened recently that it took Petrella a moment to think who Alwyn Corder was. Then he said, "You mean the other man, the one who helped Light assault that bank manager, at Exeter?"

"Yes. Corder was one of the joint managing directors in a demolition firm. Light worked for the same firm."

"Managing director? Are you sure?"

"Quite sure. It's all in the company office records. The other director was a Douglas Marchant. Marchant and Corder started the firm just after the war. It went broke in 1952. I've searched every record we possess—not only the Directories, but Electors Registers, Motor Car License lists, Passport Office lists—"

"Perhaps he's dead."

"The Register of Deaths at Somerset House was the first place I searched."

"Well," said Petrella. "Perhaps—" and got no further, because Wilmot came in like an express train.

"Guess what?" he said. "A third banknote's turned up, and we've got a cross reference."

Three heads went up, like three nestlings offered food.

"A jobbing printer in New Cross. Luckily he used the note for a subscription to the local police charity. When they saw the mark, they took it back to him, and he said it was part of a payment he'd had that morning for a job he'd done printing the souvenir menus for a charity dinner"—Wilmot paused with considerable artistry—"at the Homburg-Carleton."

"Good work," said Petrella softly. "Which charity?"

"It's a Society which sends kids to the seaside."

Petrella turned up his list. "That's right," he said. "The S.S.H.U.C. They were having a show that night. Can't be a coincidence."

"Who was the organizer?" said Jane.

"Mrs. Constantia Velden, O.B.E."

"I'm sure I know the name. Doesn't she do a lot of these things? She's almost a professional organizer."

"Out of my line."

"It's in mine," said Jane. "I did a London season." She departed.

There was a lot of checking and cross-checking to be done, and it was after six before she came back. Sergeant Edwards and Wilmot had gone home. Petrella saw, from the pink patches in her cheeks and the sparkle in her eye, that something had happened.

"I've located your woman organizer," she said. "She lives in a very nice house in St. Johns Wood, with a cook, a chauffeur and three dalmatians. Oozing with money and good works."

"What else?"

"How do you know there's something else?"

"Because you're almost bursting to tell me."

"I've a good mind not to," said Jane. "Well, all right. As a matter of fact, it didn't take very long to find out about Mrs. Velden. And it was a nice day. So I went up on to Crouch End and saw the Reverend Mortleman."

"The devil you did! What did you say?"

"I said I was Mrs. Velden's secretary, and she was a bit anxious, because he hadn't acknowledged the last lot of money she'd sent him."

Petrella stared at her.

"He was most upset. Said he was sure he had acknowledged it. He insisted on me coming in, so that he could find a carbon copy of his letter to Mrs. Velden. He did find it too. So I apologized. Then we had tea together."

When Petrella had recovered his breath he said, "You were taking a bit of a chance, weren't you? Suppose he'd known Mrs. Velden's secretary by sight."

"He couldn't have known her new one."

"Her new one?"

"She's been advertising in *The Times*. That's what gave me the idea. Couldn't I answer the advertisement?"

Before Petrella could string together some of the many ways of saying no to this outrageous proposal she hurried on.

"I don't suppose Mrs. Velden's a master criminal. She certainly doesn't sound like one. But all this money is coming *through* her. She must have some connection with the organizers. If I was working for her, and kept my eyes open, I could probably spot—"

Petrella found his voice at last. "You're not even a policewoman," he said. "You're a typist."

It wasn't, perhaps, the best way of putting it. Jane turned dark red, and said, "Of all the

stupid, stuffy, ungrateful things to say—"

"I'm sorry . . ."

"Don't you *want* to solve this? Don't you *want* to find out who's running it?"

"Now you're being silly."

"At least I'm not being pompous."

Petrella said, "I'm sorry if I sound pompous, but what you don't seem to realize is that I can't possibly let you take an active part in this, without getting into frightful trouble with the Establishment." He added hastily, "It's very late, and we're both a bit tired, I expect. Come and have something to eat."

"Thank you," said Jane, "but as a typist, I know my place." She made a dignified exit.

Petrella swore, and took a running kick at the metal wastepaper basket. It rose in a neat parabola and broke a window.

Next morning Petrella made a point of getting to the office early. He found Jane alone there, typing furiously. He selected the most propitiatory of half a dozen opening gambits which he had worked out during a sleepless night.

Before he could start, Jane said, "I'm sorry I was stupid last night. Obviously you couldn't do it."

This took the wind out of Petrella's sail so effectively that he could only stare at her.

"As a matter of fact," he said at last, "I had a word with the A.C.—with your uncle, that is—and he said that, compared with some of the things you'd tried to talk him into letting you do, this sounded comparatively harmless."

"Bully for Uncle Wilfred."

"But he laid down certain conditions. First, you're to report, by telephone, to this office every night between five and seven. Use a call box, not a private telephone. Second, if ever you're going out anywhere, you're to let us know where you're going."

"It all seems a bit unnecessary to me," said Jane. "But I'll do it if you insist."

"All that remains now is for you to get the job."

"I rather think I've got it. I went round to see Mrs. Velden last night. It turned out that she knew a friend of a friend of my mother's. We got on like a house on fire." Seeing the look in Petrella's eye, she added hastily, "Of course, if you'd said no, I wouldn't have taken the job. I thought there was no harm in seeing if I could get it. And I'll remember to telephone you every night."

"It won't be me for the next few nights," said Petrella

gently. "I'm off to Germany."

The Baron von der Hülde und Oberath propelled a cedar-wood cabinet of cigars across his desk toward Petrella, helped himself to one, lit both of them with a long match, and picked up the photograph again.

"Certainly this is one of our drills," he said.

"How long has it been in production?"

"Five years. A little more."

"And in that time how many have you exported to England?"

"I should have to consult my records. Perhaps a hundred." Petrella's heart sank.

"It is a highly efficient drill," said the Baron. "I sent half a dozen the other day to one of your Safe Deposits."

"Safe Deposits?"

"A good Safe Deposit only possesses one key for each of its safes. If the depositor loses it, the safe has to be broken open. The screws of the hinges have to be drilled out—but it takes an exceptionally good drill to do it. Any ordinary one would break, or melt. A number of cooling devices had been tried before. None successfully. Then we invented this method. It is so very simple: As the drill gets hotter, it sweats. Just like the human body. It exudes its own lubricant. We call it 'film cooling.'"

"I see," said Petrella. "And no one else but you makes these drills?"

"We have the world patent."

"Then you could compile, from your records, a list of people in England whom you have supplied?"

"I could no doubt do so, but it might take a couple of days."

"It'll be worth waiting for."

"When the list is ready I will telephone your hotel. The Goldenes Kreuz, isn't it? Take another cigar with you, please. You can smoke it this evening."

Petrella spent the afternoon exploring Dortmund, mostly from the top of a tram. It seemed to him an unattractive city. At seven o'clock he got back to his hotel, and had a bath. Then he set out to have a look at the night life.

First, he stood himself a large, and rather heavy, meal at the Barberina. Then he moved on to one of the many beer cellars in the Augusta Platz and ordered a stein of what described itself as the world-famous Munchner Lowenbrau, which tasted no better and no worse than any lager beer he had drunk in an English pub.

On the wall opposite was an advertisement, depicting a man with a monocle smoking a cigar. It looked like a stylized version of the Baron von der Hulde und Oberath. As this thought

occurred to him, another one crossed his mind, and he put down his beer slowly.

The Baron had said, "I will telephone your hotel—the Goldenes Kreuz." How did he know which hotel to telephone? Petrella had certainly not told him.

He went back, very carefully, over the events of the morning. He had driven straight from the airport to the headquarters of the city police, to check in with Inspector Laufer, a contact arranged for him by Baldy. The Inspector had given him the names of the possible manufacturers of drills, of which the Baron had been the largest and the most likely.

Might the Inspector have telephoned the Baron, to tell him Petrella was coming, and might he have mentioned the name of his hotel?

No. That was impossible. For the simple reason that Petrella had not, at that time, chosen a hotel. He had gone to the Goldenes Kreuz after leaving the police station.

It was at this point that his thoughts became linked with a suspicion which had never been quite out of his mind since he had left the hotel.

He was being followed.

It was impossible to say how he knew, but now that he gave his mind to it, he was quite

certain. In London the discovery would not have worried him. Here, in a foreign country, in a strange city, it was less agreeable.

His first idea was to telephone Inspector Laufer, but he dismissed it as soon as he thought of it. There was no explanation he could make which would not sound ludicrous. Dortmund might not be beautiful, but it was a well-organized modern city, with an efficient police force, and well-lit streets. All he had to do was to walk back to his hotel, go up to his room, bolt the door on the inside, and go to bed.

He paid his bill, recovered his coat and hat, and climbed the steps which led up to the street.

A storm of rain had cleared the air and emptied the streets. He stepped out briskly. No one seemed to be taking the least interest in him. Halfway down the Augusta Platz he had to turn right, into the smaller street which would, in turn, bring him to the Station Square.

It was at this moment that he heard the car start off behind him. Something in the note of the engine sounded a warning. He jerked his head round, and saw the car coming, straight at him.

Without stopping to think, he jerked himself to one side, spotted a narrow side street ahead, and ran down it. It was when he heard the car going into reverse that he realized his mistake. He should have stuck to the main street.

The side street stretched ahead of him, badly lit, absolutely empty, sloping steeply downhill. Behind him, the headlamps of the car flicked on, pinning him.

He reckoned he had a good twenty yards' start. On his left stretched the unbroken wall of a large building; no entrance, not even a recess. The right-hand side was blocked by a high iron railing.

He put on speed. There was a T junction at the bottom, and what looked like a rather better-lighted road. He swung round the corner. The car, which had been catching up, cornered behind him.

Petrella sidestepped. His plan was to turn in his tracks, and run in the opposite direction before the car could turn. He had reckoned without the driver. As he side-stepped, the car swerved too. The wing caught him in the small of the back, scooped him up, and tossed him against the fence which bordered the road.

The car screamed to a halt, and went into reverse.

Petrella was lying at the inner edge of the pavement, close to the fence. There was a stabbing pain in his chest, and he seemed to have lost the use of his legs.

He could see the driver now, with his head out of the side window. He had a heavy, white, bad-tempered face.

As he watched, the driver maneuvered the near-side wheels of his car carefully up onto the pavement, judged the distance to where Petrella lay, and started to reverse.

When he's been over me once, thought Petrella, he'll come back again just to make sure. Petrella's legs were like sacks of sand, but he still had the use of his arms. Pressing on the pavement, he rolled himself over, and then over again until he was pressed hard against the bottom of the wooden fence.

It was no use. The car was on him now. The near-side wheels were going over him.

Petrella heaved wildly, felt the skirting board at the foot of the fence bend, and heaved again. There was a dull crack. A complete length of board gave way, and Petrella went rolling, over and over, down a grassy bank to come to rest with a thud at the bottom.

He was on gravel. His groping hand found a wire, and he hauled himself up on his

knees. The fall had done something for his legs, which were now hurting as much as his chest; but they seemed to be answering signals again. He crawled forward, pulling himself by the wire.

The fence rocked and splintered as his pursuers, too bulky to squeeze through the space underneath, battered it down.

Petrella crawled faster.

Behind him he heard the fence go down with a crack.

There was a circular opening on the left. It looked like a drain. He crawled into it, until a bend in the pipe forced him to stop. Footsteps thundered past. Men were shouting. There was a rumbling, thudding noise, which shook the ground; a hiss of steam, and the clanking of iron on iron.

For the first time he realized that he was on a railway line. The wire he had been following must have been a signal wire. What he was in now was some sort of rainwater conduit. There was plenty of water coming down it too.

More voices, angry voices. Official voices. A dog barking.

Petrella pushed himself backward until he was out in the open again. Some way up the line an argument was going on. Orders were being shouted in loud, angry German.

Petrella propped himself against the bank, and started massaging the life back into his sodden legs. A dog slipped out of the darkness, and stood watching him.

"Good boy," said Petrella hopefully. The dog gave a sharp bark, like a Sergeant-Major calling the parade to attention.

Two men appeared. They were in the green uniform of the railway police. As soon as they saw him, both of them started to shout.

When they seemed to have finished, Petrella said in impeccable German, "Conduct me, at once, if you please, to Inspector Laufer, of the Municipal Police."

Even the dog seemed impressed by this.

Constantia Velden was a compulsive talker. She didn't really need a secretary, Jane Orfrey decided. What she needed was a captive audience. And Jane, for two whole days, had been it.

There were advantages, of course. Within an hour, and without any actual effort on her part, she had learned almost all there was to know about Constantia; about her late husband, who had been an administrative officer in the Air Force, and had died of hepatic jaundice in 1955; about her

brother, Douglas, a Wing Commander, D.S.O., D.F.C., now the managing director of a firm manufacturing window frames, with a London office in Lennox Street; about Constantia's charitable enterprises; about the time Constantia had shaken hands with the Queen; about life; about money.

Money seemed to come into most of Mrs. Velden's calculations. Reading between the lines, Jane deduced that she had inherited a reasonable competence from her late husband, and that she was helped out, where necessary, by her brother. He advised her on her investments and looked after her tax. He had also brought Alex into the picture, and probably paid his salary as well.

Alex was the only other resident at the Loudon Road house, and was chauffeur, butler, gardener, and footman combined. A husky, brown-haired, freckled boy, who looked no more than sixteen and was in fact in his early twenties. He did everything that was beyond the strength or capacity of Mrs. Velden and her cohort of daily women. What spare time Alex had, he spent polishing his employer's car and tuning up his own motorcycle.

He was out with her now. A lunch date with brother Douglas, she gathered. Jane munched

her way through a solitary meal, and wondered, for the twentieth time, what possible connection her talkative, middle-aged employer could have with an organization which had made bank robbery a fine art. Her faith told her that the connection was there. After 48 hours, her reason was beginning to doubt it.

It was three o'clock before the car reappeared in Loudon Road and Alex jumped out and held the door open for Mrs. Velden. Jane caught a glimpse of her, and of the man who followed her out. So Douglas had accompanied his sister home. Interesting.

Then the drawing-room door opened, and he came in, holding it open for his sister and closing it behind her.

He was a man of about six foot, with the round shoulders and barrel chest of a boxer; thick black hair, graying round the edges; a face dominated by a long straight nose which turned out, suddenly, at the end, over a bush of gray mustache. Like a downpipe, she thought, emptying into a clump of weeds. A disillusioned pair of eyes peered out from under thick black eyebrows.

"Wing Commander Marchant, Jane Orfrey."

"Plain Douglas Marchant, if you don't mind," said the man.

"You're my sister's new secretary. Has she driven you mad yet?"

"Really, Douglas . . ."

"If she hasn't, she will. She goes through secretaries at the rate of two a week. She's a Gorgon. She doesn't realize that the days of indentured labor are over. There are more jobs than secretaries. Girls please themselves. Isn't that right?"

"More or less," said Jane.

"As soon as you present yourself to an agency they offer you a dozen jobs, and say, Take your pick."

"It isn't quite as easy as that."

"What agency do you use, by the way?"

It came out so swiftly that Jane gaped for a moment, and said, "As a matter of fact, I got this job through an advertisement."

"But you must have an agency," said Douglas gently. "You'll never get properly paid if you don't."

"Really, Douglas," said Constantia. "Are you trying to lure her away?"

"I don't see why not. I don't mind betting you underpay her."

"Perhaps she doesn't want to work in an office."

"I think it would be terribly dull," said Jane.

"You wouldn't be dull in my

office," said Douglas. "Eighteen pounds a week, and luncheon vouchers."

Jane felt it was time she asserted herself. "If I had to work in an office," she said, "I'd choose a professional office, I think. Not a commercial one."

"There, if I may say so, you display your ignorance," said Douglas. "Professional men overwork their staff and underpay them. They operate on too small a scale to do anything else. We're just the opposite. We've got factories all over England. There's hardly a building goes up that hasn't got our windows in it."

"You may be right," said Jane. "But personally I find businessmen so boring. They think and talk of nothing but money."

"What businessmen have you worked for?" inquired Douglas politely.

Damn, thought Jane. I walked into that one. Better watch out. He's a lot cleverer than he looks.

"Two or three," she said. And to Constantia, "Should I see if we can raise a cup of tea?"

"Not for me," said Douglas. "I've got to be off. A bit of money grubbing to do. I'll get Alex to drive me back into town, if you don't mind."

Jane telephoned Sergeant Wilmot at six o'clock that evening, from a call box on Hampstead Heath. "This is urgent," she said. "See what you can find out about Douglas Marchant. Ex-R.A.F. Runs a business which makes windows. Not widows—windows. It's got a head office in Lennox Street, and factories all over the place."

"Wasn't he the other director in the firm Light worked for, just after the war?"

"That's right. And he's Mrs. Velden's brother. He gives her money. Any banknotes she's been passing could easily have come from him."

"I suppose they could have."

She could hear the doubt in Wilmot's voice, and said urgently, "We're looking for a man who *could* run a show like this. Well, I'm telling you, Douglas Marchant fills the bill. I can't explain it all over the telephone. But he's big enough and bad enough—"

"A big bad wolf," said Wilmot. "Okay, I'll take your word for it. We'll certainly have him checked up."

"Any news from Germany?"

"Not a word," said Wilmot.

As Jane came out of the telephone booth she heard a motorcycle start up and move off. When she got back the house was in darkness, and she

let herself in with her own key, and went into the drawing room.

She felt restless and uneasy, and had no difficulty in putting her finger on the cause of it. The powerful and unpleasant personality of Douglas Marchant seemed to linger in the room, like the smell of a cigar long after its owner had departed. She realized that it was the first time she had been alone in the house.

Leaving the light on in the drawing room, she went along to what Constantia called her business room at the end of the hall. Her objective was Constantia's desk. She found that all the drawers in it were locked, so was the filing cabinet, and so were the closets under the bookcases which lined one wall. The books in the shelves were mostly political and military history, and this surprised her, until it occurred to her that they probably represented the departed Mr. Velden's taste rather than Constantia's.

She took down one of the six volumes of Lloyd George's *War Memoirs*, blew the dust off the top, and opened it.

From an ornate bookplate the named jumped out at her—ALWYN CORDER.

Jane stared at it in blank disbelief. Then she started

taking down books at random. The bookplate was in most of them. For a moment she was unable to think straight. She knew that she had stumbled on something desperately important.

A slight sound at the door made her swing around. Alex was smiling at her. "Looking for something to read?" he said.

Sergeant Edwards said to Wilmot, "It's a big company. Douglas Marchant is the chairman. Leaves most of the work to his staff, and comes up twice a week from the country to justify his director's fees."

"Anything known?"

"As far as Records know, the company and Marchant are both as clean as two proverbial whistles. What have we got on them?"

"What we've got," said Wilmot, "is a woman's instinct. Jane doesn't like his smell. She thinks he's a bad one."

"It doesn't seem a lot to go on," said Edwards doubtfully. "When's Petrella coming back?"

"Baldy hasn't heard a chirrup out of him for twenty-four hours," said Wilmot. "If you ask me, he's found himself a Rhinemaiden."

It was after midnight when the bedside telephone rang. The redheaded girl, who had been

sharing Douglas Marchant's flat, and bed, for the past month, groaned and said, "Don't take any notice, Doug. It's probably a wrong number."

"Hand it over," said Douglas, who was lying on his back beside her. He balanced the instrument on his stomach and unhooked the receiver. As soon as he heard the voice at the other end he cupped a hand over the receiver and said, "Out you get, honey. It's business."

"This is a nice time to do business."

"Get up and get us both a cup of tea."

Not until the girl had grumbled her way into a dressing gown and out of the room did Douglas remove his hand from the receiver and say, "Sorry, Alex, there was someone here. It's all right now. Go ahead."

His pajama top was unbuttoned, showing a chest fuzzed with graying black hair. One of his thick hands held the telephone. The other was fumbling on the bedside table for a cigarette. His face was expressionless.

At the end he said, "Let's see if I've got this straight. Each of the three evenings she's been there, she's been out about the same time and made a call from a public phone booth. And this evening you found her in the

library, snooping through a lot of books which had the old bookplates still in them. Damn, damn, and damn."

There was a long silence as if each was waiting for the other to speak.

Then Douglas said, "If she's what we think she is, and if she's got a regular reporting time, she won't pass any of this on until six o'clock tomorrow night. We ought to do something about it before then, I think."

Alex said, "Yes, I think we ought."

"I can't attend to it myself. I'm flying over to Germany tomorrow afternoon. There's been some trouble at the factory. Could you think of an excuse to take her out in the car?"

Alex said, "Suppose I said I had left some papers at the office which had to be taken to the airport—and you had a message for your sister—something like that."

"It's worth trying," said Douglas.

"When I get her in the car—what then?"

"My dear Alex, I must leave all the arrangements to you. A moonlight picnic, perhaps."

As he rang off, the red-haired girl came back with two cups of tea. Douglas drank his slowly. He didn't seem to want

to talk. The redheaded girl thought that Douglas, though a generous spender, was a tiny bit odd, and had been becoming odder just lately.

Now the look in his eyes frightened her. At the age of 25 she was something of an expert on men, and she made up her mind, there and then, to clear out while Douglas was in Germany—and not to come back.

When, late the following afternoon, Alex told Jane that he had to collect some papers and take them to the airport, and that Marchant had asked that she should go too so that he could give her a message for his sister, her first reaction was to say no. Then she reflected that no harm could really be planned on the crowded roads between Central London and London Airport.

"I'll have to ask Mrs. Velden," she said.

"I've asked her. She says the trip'll do you good."

"When do we start?"

"Right now."

"I'll have to get a coat," said Jane.

She ran up to her room and stood listening. The house was quiet. She tiptoed across the corridor and into Mrs. Velden's bedroom. As she had hoped, there was a bedside telephone extension. She grabbed the

receiver, and dialed the special number which she knew by heart.

"Hello," said Wilmot's voice. "What's up?"

"No time to explain," said Jane. "Alex is taking me, in Mrs. Velden's car, to London Airport. We're calling at the Lennox Street office first. Can you put a tail on?"

"Can do," said Wilmot. "But why—"

He found himself talking to a dead telephone. Jane had gone.

It was half past five by the time they reached Lennox Street. While Alex was inside, Jane looked cautiously round to see if Wilmot had been as good as his word. She could see a small green van, apparently delivering parcels at the far end of the road, but nothing else.

By six o'clock, with dusk coming up, they were across Kew Bridge, and had joined the tail end of the home-going traffic on the Twickenham Road.

"Quicker this way," said Alex, "until they've finished messing about with the flyover on the Great West Road. Trouble is, everyone else knows it too. Let's try a short cut."

He swung expertly across the traffic and turned into a long road of neat houses, with neat gardens and neat cars in neat

garages. At the far end of the road the street lamps petered out and they came to a halt in an area of empty lots and high fences.

"It's a dead end," said Jane.

"Not the last time I came here, it wasn't," said Alex. "Let's have a squint at the map. It's in the pocket."

As he leaned over her, she felt the needle go into her arm. For a moment she thought it was an accident—that a loose pin in Alex's coat might have stuck into her. Then she realized what had happened, and started to fight, but Alex was lying half on top of her, his thick leather driving glove feeling for her mouth.

A minute later the boy sat back in his seat, and relaxed cautiously. He had given her a full shot of pelandramine. She'd be out for an hour, and dopey for another hour after that. So there was no hurry.

He looked at himself in the driving mirror; and was pleased with the unexcited face that looked back. He stripped off the driving gloves and felt his own pulse, timing it with his wrist watch. 84. Twelve faster than it should be, but not bad. He took out a comb and ran it through his hair.

Then he examined the girl. Her mouth was open and she

was breathing noisily. Her cheeks were flushed. Anyone looking at her would think that she'd been drinking too much, and had passed out. Just the ticket.

He felt in the right-hand doorpocket and took out a small bottle of gin. A few drops round her mouth and chin. A little on her dress. Enough for people to smell it, if he was stopped.

He opened the door. There was no one in sight. He threw the gin bottle and the empty hypodermic syringe over the fence, got back, turned the car, and drove off slowly the way he had come.

The mist was thicker. At the Slough roundabout he took the Staines road, driving carefully now. He crossed Staines Bridge, following the Egham road. At Egham the road forked. The main road, with its string of garages, its traffic and its orange neon lighting, went away to the left. The right fork, a much smaller road, followed the river toward Windsor. In summer this road too would be crowded with traffic heading for the open spaces of Runnymede Meadow. Now, on a damp February night, it was empty.

Half a mile along, Alex turned out his headlights and drove very carefully off the road and onto the rough grass.

There was some danger of getting the car bogged down, but his town-and-country studded tires would grip most surfaces. There was a worse danger. Somewhere ahead was the Thames, its bank unprotected by any fence.

Alex stopped the car, got out, and walked forward, counting his paces. It was fifty yards to the bank. He came back, climbed in, and drove the car forward cautiously in low gear.

When he stopped again, he was only five yards from the edge. At this point, where the bank curved, it had been reinforced with concrete bags against the sweep of the winter floods. A yard below his feet, the river ran, cold, gray, and sleek.

Alex walked back to the car. Jane had slumped over sideways, so that when he opened the door she nearly fell out. He got his hands under her body and lifted her onto the wet grass.

Alone, islanded by the mist, touching the girl's body, moving it, arranging it, gave him a sense of power, near to exultation. He crouched beside her for a full minute to let the singing noise in his ears die down and the lights stop flashing in front of his eyes. Then he got up slowly, went

round to the back of the car, opened the trunk compartment and took out two fourteen-pound weights and a coil of odd-looking plaited cord.

With the cord he tied Jane's wrists together in front of her, passing the ends through the handles of the weights and knotting them.

When he stood up, he saw three pairs of yellow eyes looking at him through the mist. He thought, for a moment, that it was his imagination playing him tricks again. Then he heard the engines, growling to themselves, as the cars bumped across the grass in low gear, closing in.

He bent quickly, hoisted the girl onto his shoulders, and walked to the bank.

A man's voice shouted urgently, and an orange spotlight flicked on.

Alex humped his powerful shoulders, threw the girl ahead of him into the water, and jumped after her. While he was still in mid-air, a second body flashed past him.

Jane came up out of a tangle of nightmare, of darkness and cold, of lights and noises, into the reality of a hospital bed. The sun was slanting through the uncurtained window, and Sergeant Wilmot was perched on a chair beside her.

"Good morning," he said.
"Are you ready to talk?"

"I'm all right," said Jane.
"I'll get dressed, if you can find my clothes."

"The doctor says he'll let you out in a day or two, if you're good. Let's have the story."

She told him what she could remember, and Sergeant Wilmot wrote it down in his round, schoolboy hand.

"I felt the needle go in my arm," she said. "I don't really know what happened after that."

"Alex took you in the car to Runnymede, and pitched you into the river. Having first tied a couple of weights onto you. I wonder how many of his girl friends he's got rid of that way before?" He pulled a length of cord out of his pocket.
"Simple, but you've got to hand it to him. It's clever. It's made of paper. Twenty or thirty separate strands of it, plaited tight together. Strong enough—but it'd melt after you'd been a day or two in the water."

Jane shuddered uncontrollably, and Sergeant Wilmot said, "I never had much tact," and put the cord away.

"Who pulled me out?"

"I did," said Wilmot. "It's the sort of thing you sometimes get a medal for. We were behind

you all the way. If it hadn't been for the fog and the mess up on Staines Bridge we'd have been close enough to stop you going in the water."

"What's happened to Alex?"

"He's in the hospital at the Scrubs. In a private room. And that's where he's going to stay until Patrick gets back."

"Haven't we heard anything yet?"

"He's been off the air for nearly forty-eight hours. He'll turn up. Don't worry."

"Who said I was worrying?"

"You looked worried. Just for a moment."

Jane laughed and said, "If I'm going to be kept here, you can do something for me. Get me those photo-copies of the diary pages, and a classified directory of London. I've had a hunch and I want to work it out."

When Wilmot had gone, she stretched luxuriously, and then settled down into the warm bed. She liked the way Wilmot called Petrella, Patrick; and she wondered if she'd ever be able to do it herself. A minute later, she was asleep.

At eleven o'clock on the following morning the door of her room opened. Jane, who was deep in a street directory, her bed covered with slips of paper, said, "Put it down on the table, could you, nurse—"

looked up, and saw that it was Petrella.

"Hello," she said.

"As soon as my back's turned," said Petrella, "you have to go and do a damn silly thing like that."

"Listen who's talking," said Jane. "What have you been up to? And what's wrong with your leg?"

"Someone tried to run me over. I rolled down a bank onto a railway."

"Well, I fell into a river. That's not much worse."

They both laughed. Petrella sat down on the end of the bed, and said, "You know why they had to shut your mouth, don't you?"

"Something about those books. I couldn't work it out."

"Listen, and I'll tell you. In 1951 two men were sentenced at the Exeter assizes for assaulting a bank manager. One was our friend Jerry Light of Islington. The other was one of the managing directors of the demolition firm he worked for. A man called Alwyn Corder, who disappeared so completely that even Sergeant Edwards couldn't trace him. Because the simple explanation eluded us all. When Corder came out of prison, he changed his name to Velden. All legal and above-board, by deed poll, registered in the High Court. I checked it

this morning. And in that name, he married Constantia Marchant, Douglas Marchant's sister. It was a business alliance. Douglas was his fellow director in the demolition firm."

"I see," said Jane. "Yes, I see." A lot of tiny pieces were falling into place, and a certain pattern was appearing.

"There's a lot that isn't clear yet," said Petrella. "But the outline's there. Douglas Marchant, and Alwyn Corder, his brother-in-law, now known as Kenneth Velden, and their old foreman, Jerry Light, are the three people who started this racket, and ran it. That's for sure. Then Velden died. The other two couldn't simply hang on to his share. They paid it over to his widow."

"Then Douglas is head of the whole affair?"

"It's got to be proved."

"And it would help to prove it if you could show that he was still keeping in touch with Jerry Light?"

Petrella grinned, and said, "Cough it up."

"Cough what up?"

"Whatever it is you've discovered."

"All right. It's this diary you found in Light's desk. The entries are meeting places—they're pubs. *Rsg Sn* is the Rising Sun. *Wdmn* is the Woodman, and so on. The letter

and numbers after the pub are the postal district, and the last number's the time of day. That's what first made me think they must be pubs, because the times are all between eleven and two, or six and ten."

Petrella got up, and stood for a long moment staring down at her.

Then he said, "That's very good indeed," limped across to the door, and went quietly out, shutting the door behind him.

"Douglas Marchant," said Petrella to Baldwin, "makes windows. The windows go into new buildings all over England. In nearly all big building projects the subcontractors get paid on the same day in the month. Therefore, there must be a lot of money in the main contractors' bank the day before. That's how the intelligence system works. When the bank has been chosen, a gang of specialist safebreakers do the actual work. Jerry Light gives them their instructions, and their kit. And his men collect the appropriate rake-off after the job's over. That's what the Franks brothers were waiting for, in Slough, that morning."

"How are we going to prove all this?"

"If we could get one of Jerry Light's boys to sing, he *might* give us Light. If we hooked

Light, he *might* give us Marchant."

"You don't sound very hopeful."

"They're going to be a tough bunch to drive that sort of wedge into. They've been working together too long, and they know each other too well."

"Have you any better ideas?"

"Yes," said Petrella slowly. "I have an idea, but it's so irregular that we're going to need all the backing the A.C. can give us. First, I want Jerry Light's phone tapped."

Baldwin made a face. "You know what they think about that, don't you? Anything else?"

"That's just a start," said Petrella. "The next really is a bit hot. Now, listen—"

At London Airport the loudspeaker in the Arrival Lounge said, "We have a message for Mr. Douglas Marchant, believed to be traveling from Dortmund. Would Mr. Marchant report to the reception desk?"

Douglas hesitated for a long moment.

If things really had started to happen, might it not be wisest to turn straight round and take the next airplane back to Germany?

He rejected the idea as soon as it occurred to him. It was by abandoning careful, prearranged plans and acting on the impulse of blind panic that people gave themselves away and got caught. He marched firmly up to the reception desk and smiled at the girl behind it.

He produced his passport. "I understand you have a message for me."

"Mr. Douglas Marchant? Would you telephone this number? You can use the telephone in the office, if you wish."

"Thank you," said Douglas. He dialed the number, which he recognized as his sister, Constantia's.

"Douglas. Thank heavens you're back. I didn't know where to get hold of you, so I had to leave a message at the airport."

"What's happened?"

"Alex and Jane Orfrey have both disappeared. And they've taken the car with them."

"When did this happen?"

"Two nights ago. I've been so worried."

"You've told the police?"

"Of course. But they've done nothing. They even suggested"—Douglas heard his sister choke—"that they might have eloped together."

"I suppose it's possible."

"Don't be absurd. Alex was

a chauffeur—a mechanic—"

"And Jane was your secretary."

"That's different. She was a girl of good family."

Douglas was about to say something flippant, when he realized that his sister was upset; and being upset, might do something stupid.

"I'll make some inquiries," he said. "I'll ring you back as soon as I have any news for you."

As soon as he had rung off, he dialed another number. The girl who answered the telephone said, "Who's that? Mr. Wilberforce. I'll see if Mr. Simmons is in." And a few seconds later, "No, I'm sorry. He's just gone out. Can I get him to ring you back?"

"Don't bother," said Douglas. "When he does come back, would you give him a message? Tell him that I got the letter he sent me on the third of March."

"Right char," said the girl.

As soon as she had rung off, she walked through to the inner office and said, "That was Mr. Wilberforce, Mr. Simmons. You did say you weren't in if he telephoned."

"That's what I said," agreed Mr. Simmons, a short, sharp-looking man in thick bifocals. "And that's what I meant. Did he leave a message?"

"He just said that he got the

letter you sent on the third of March."

"You're sure he said the third of March?"

"I'm not deaf yet," said the girl.

"All right," said Mr. Simmons. "Plug a line through to this telephone, and you can go to lunch."

"Tisn't lunchtime."

"Then go and buy yourself a new hat."

Mr. Simmons listened until he heard the outer door shut, drew the telephone toward himself, and dialed an Islington number.

Jerry Light, who answered the telephone, said, "You're sure it was the third of March he said? All right. Thanks very much," and rang off. He opened the drawer of his desk, extracted the diary that lay there, and opened it at the first week in March.

Then he looked at his watch. It was just after twelve. He crammed a hat on his head, went down the outside staircase into the yard, said, "Watch things, Sammy. I'm going out," to the shaggy young man who was sawing a length of timber, and set off at a brisk pace. He seemed to be walking haphazardly, choosing small empty streets. But his course was steadily northeast.

One o'clock was striking

when he went through the door of a small public house in the neighborhood of Hackney Downs, said, "Wotcher, Len," to the landlord, and walked through the serving area into the private room behind.

Douglas Marchant was sitting in front of the fire, nursing a glass of whiskey. He indicated another glass, ready poured, which stood on the table.

Light said, "Ta," took a drink and added, "I take it you saw the news."

"That's why I came back from Germany. All that the papers said was that Alex got out of the hospital at the Scrubs yesterday morning and clean away. No details. It mightn't be true."

"It's true all right," said Light. "He telephoned me this morning."

Marchant's lip went up. "At your place?"

"No. He had sense enough not to do that. He got me through Shady Simmons."

"Did he tell you how he got picked up?"

"He thinks it was just bad luck. A police patrol car spotted him tipping the girl into the river."

"I don't believe in bad luck like that," said Marchant. "Do you?"

"Not really," said Light. "I think they're moving in on us."

"What did Alex want?"

"A place to hide out in. He spent last night on the Embankment. And for you to get him out of the country."

"Or what?"

"So far, he's kept his mouth shut. If he did decide to talk, he could tell them a hell of a lot they want to know."

Marchant drank a little more whiskey. "We'll have to do something about him," he said. "The only place he'd be safe would be in East Germany."

"I can think of somewhere that'd be a damned sight safer," said Jerry.

A red coal dropped from the fire. The clock on the mantelshelf ticked. In the bar, Douglas could hear the landlord saying, "Nice sort of day for March." He had said it to every customer who came in.

Douglas finished his drink and got up. He said, "I think you're right. We're going to pack up this lark soon. We don't want any loose ends. I've got to go and hold my sister's hand—she's having hysterics. We'll go out the back way."

As the two men emerged from the alleyway, a girl approached them. She had a collector's tray of little red and white flowers. "For the Cottage Hospital," she said. She was a nice-looking girl. Douglas felt in his pocket, found half a crown,

dropped it in her tin, and said, "Keep the flower. You can sell it again."

The girl said, "Thank you, sir." Douglas noticed that she had an outsize flower with a black center pinned onto the shoulder of her dress.

At nine o'clock that night Jerry Light left his flat in Albany Street and walked to the garage where he parked his car. The attendant said, "She ought to be all right now."

In the act of getting into the car, Light paused, "What do you mean, now?"

"Now the distributor head's been fixed."

"I didn't tell you to do that."

"It wasn't us. The man came round from the makers with it. He fixed it himself."

"Oh," said Light. "Yes. Of course. I'd forgotten about that. He fixed it, did he? Come to think of it, I won't be needing the car just now. I've changed my mind."

He left the garage, hailed a taxi, and was driven through Regent's Park to Clarence Gate. Here he dismissed the taxi. Five minutes' quick walk brought him to a row of garages in a cul-de-sac behind Baker Street station.

Light was tolerably sure that no one knew about his second

car. It was a new M.G. Magnette, with a capacious trunk compartment in which he had stored two bulging suitcases and a carry-all. He had rented the garage in another name, had installed the car in it three months before, and had not visited it since.

The only trouble was that it was now raining so hard that it was difficult to keep observation as he walked. He didn't think anyone was following him, but was not quite sure.

He backed the car out and drove slowly into the park, which he proceeded to circle twice. Headlights showed, blurred by the rain, in his mirror. Cars overtook him. Cars passed him. At the end of the second circuit he was reasonably happy, turned out of the park at Gloucester Gate, and headed north.

"He's making it damned difficult for us," said Wilmot into his car wireless. "I wish he'd used his first car. I'd got that fixed nicely. All we'd have had to do then would be sit back and track him on the radio repeater. Over."

"Count your blessings," said Petrella into his wireless. "If it wasn't raining so damned hard, he'd probably have spotted us long ago. Over and out."

Jerry Light drove steadily up Highgate Hill, across the North

Circular Road, and on toward Barnet. His plan was very simple. He was not a believer in elaboration. His instructions to Alex had been to come by Underground to High Barnet and then to walk out onto the main North Road and along it for a quarter of a mile, past the golf course, timing himself to get to the point where the road forked by eleven o'clock. Alex was to come alone, and make damned sure he wasn't followed.

Light looked at his watch. He was in nice time. Five minutes to eleven, and that was High Barnet station on the right. The rain was coming down like steel rods. Alex must be getting very wet.

Light followed the main road past the Elstree fork. There was very little traffic. A couple of London-bound cars came toward him over the long swell of the hill. There was nothing behind him as far as he could see.

His headlights picked out Alex standing by the roadside.

Light crawled to a stop beside him. Leaning across, he turned down the far side window. He used his left hand to do this. His right hand was resting on the floor of the car.

"That you, Jerry?" said Alex. "I'm damned wet."

"It's me," said Light. He

brought up his right hand, and shot Alex twice through the chest at point-blank range.

Alex jerked back onto his heels, went down to his knees, and fell forward, his face in the water which was cascading down the gutter.

Resting his forearm on the ledge of the window, Light took careful aim, and shot again.

The repeated detonations had deafened him, and he could hear nothing. The first thing he noticed was that headlights, backed by a powerful spotlight, had come on behind him. He slammed the car into gear, almost lifting it off the ground as he drove it forward.

A siren sounded.

The car behind him was almost on top of him. Light saw, out of the corner of his eye, a minor road to the left, swerved sharply, and went into a skid.

On a dry surface it would have come off, but the wet macadam was like ice. Instead of correcting at the end of the skid, the car swung wildly out of control, went through the fence, wires twanging like harp strings, turned, once, right over, and smacked into the concrete base of a pylon, dislocating two of the overhead lines and plunging half of High Barnet

into darkness and confusion.

So Petrella came for a second time into the presence of Assistant Commissioner Romer, and came with the heavy consciousness of failure.

"I reckoned," he said, "that if we let Alex go, they'd be in a cleft stick. Either they left him in the lurch, in which case he'd split. Or they helped him, and we caught them red-handed. Now Alex is dead, and we're further off than ever from proving any connection between the crooks who do the work, and the man at the top, who draws the big profits."

"Douglas Marchant?"

"Yes, sir. I've no doubt in my own mind that he's the man who founded the organization, and who runs it."

"It's not just what's in your mind," said Romer. "There's a good deal of concrete evidence too. That was a nice photograph our girl collector with the flowers got of him, talking to Light, outside the pub."

"He could explain that, sir. He's in windows. Light's a builder. It could have been an ordinary business chat."

"Light's a criminal," said Romer, "a man who committed a cold-blooded murder a few hours after meeting Marchant secretly at an out-of-the-way public house. I don't doubt that

he could explain the coincidence. Most things can be explained, if you try hard enough. Here's another one. Two days ago, Marchant went across to Germany. He visited your old friend, the Baron von der Hulde und Oberath. They had a long talk. The German police have got a man in the packing department. He saw Marchant coming and going, and is prepared to identify him. Last night there was a fire at the factory."

"A fire!"

"Nothing serious. It broke out in the dispatch department, and destroyed all records of dispatches during the last five years."

"I see," said Petrella.

"It's particularly intriguing because our man remembers, four or five days ago, helping to pack and dispatch a drill—to a place called Fyledean Court, near Lavenham, in Wiltshire."

"Did you say a *drill*, sir?"

"Curb your excitement. It wasn't a drill for drilling holes in metal plates. It was a drill for planting seed potatoes. Curious, all the same, that the dispatch records should have been destroyed immediately afterwards."

"It's going to be even more difficult to prove anything now."

"There's one rule I always

follow," said Romer. "When you get a smack in the eye, don't sit down. Get up and counterattack at once. I spoke to the Chief Constable of Wiltshire before you came in. He's promised to cooperate with you in every way."

"Cooperate in what, sir?"

"You're going down with the search warrant which I've secured for you, and you're going to turn Fyledean Court upside down."

"But—" said Petrella.

"But what, Inspector?"

"If I *don't* find anything, isn't there going to be the most awful row?"

"I'm prepared to accept that risk," said Romer coldly. "He shouldn't have tried to have my niece drowned. I'm rather fond of her."

Petrella drove, while Wilmot read the map.

"We'll go down to Christchurch first," he said.

"I thought we were going to Lavenham."

"We're going to call on Mr. Wynne."

"Who's Mr. Wynne, when he's at home?"

"Mr. Wynne," said Petrella, "was, until he retired, the manager of the Exeter branch of the District Bank."

"The old boy Light and Corder assaulted."

"That's right," said Petrella. "That's where this story began. I want to hear about it, before we tackle Douglas."

It was a lovely day. The early March sun was bright, but not yet very warm. Spring was round the corner, waiting for its cue.

Wilmot abandoned the map and said, "To hell with it! You know what? You ought to do something about Jane."

"Which Jane?" said Petrella, but the car had swerved a full foot to the right before he corrected it.

"Is there more than one?" said Wilmot innocently. "I mean Jane Orfrey, the girl detective, the pride of the Women Police. The one I pulled out of the river a week ago."

"What do you suggest I ought to do about her?"

"You could always marry her. If the worst came to the worst, I mean."

Petrella drove in silence for nearly a quarter of a mile, and Wilmot, who knew him better than most people, began to kick himself for having presumed.

At last Petrella said, "I've never proposed to a girl. I wouldn't know how to start."

"Don't worry," said Wilmot, relieved. "It's all a matter of technique. You get in front of her, and work your feet up till you're pretty close. Then you

distract her attention—and grab her with both hands. Under the arms, high up, is a favorite—"

"You make it sound like unarmed combat."

"It is a bit like that. Mind you, you'll find Jane's got a pretty high standard, now she's been kissed by a real expert."

"What expert?"

"Me," said Wilmot. "When I pulled her out of the water, I had to use the kiss-of-life technique. Smashing. It'll probably go better still when she's conscious—"

"Certainly I remember Marchant and Corder," said Mr. Wynne. "It's such a beautiful morning. Let's step out into the garden. I have good cause to remember," he went on. "One of my ribs never really mended. I get a sharp twinge there if I stoop suddenly."

He was one of those men who look old when they are young, and young when they are old. The lines on his face were the deep lines of age, but his eyes had the brightness, his skin the pinkness, of youth. He's looked exactly like that, Petrella decided, for half a century; like a tough old tree.

"I read all about the assault those two men made on you," Petrella said, "but what interested me most was the suggestion that your refusal to

grant this company credit was based on some sort of personal feeling."

"Personal feeling?" Mr. Wynne drew his lips in sharply, then puffed them out again like a goldfish after an ant's egg. "They must have imagined that. Bank managers aren't allowed much personal discretion. All substantial overdrafts are referred to Area."

"But in this case it was suggested that you refused to recommend credit because of some sort of quarrel."

"If there was a quarrel," said Mr. Wynne, "it was very one-sided." He stared up at an airplane, from Hurn on the cross-Channel run, which was gaining height in a leisurely circle against the pale blue-green sky. "I can remember the managing director—his name was Marchant, and he'd been in the Air Force—coming to see me in my office one morning. I hadn't quite made up my mind what I was going to recommend. He wanted a very large credit, but he had reasonable security, and the company had quite a good financial record. When I said that I should need time to think about it, he got very angry." A slight smile played across the corners of Mr. Wynne's mouth. "Very angry indeed. He said that I'd promised him the credit and

that I must let him have it."

"And had you?"

"Of course not," said Mr. Wynne. "Are you fond of tomatoes?"

They had drifted to the bottom of the garden. Along the fence which separated the garden from the recreation ground was quite a pretentious greenhouse. The far side was covered with wire netting.

"I have trouble with the children throwing things," explained Mr. Wynne. "Children seem to be brought up without discipline today. I have forced some early Cardinal Joys—they're pentagrams, of course. Would you like to try one?"

"No, thanks," said Petrella. "You were telling me about Marchant making a scene in your office."

"Yes. He lost his temper, and threatened me. I wasn't impressed."

"When you say he threatened you—do you mean physically?"

"I thought at one moment that he was going to strike me. He went very red, jumped to his feet, and came round to my side of the desk." Mr. Wynne blinked.

"And what did you do?"

"I told him to control himself. After a while he did so, and went away."

"And after that you decided

ot to recommend him for
redit."

"If you mean that I nursed a
rudge against him, you're quite
mistaken. I shouldn't allow my
personal feelings to enter into a
natter like that. It did, of
course, occur to me that a man
who had so little control over
himself might not be the safest
person to conduct a business.
That big fellow there is an
Ecballium Agreste, or squirting
cucumber—"

"Pickled gherkins," said Wil-
not to Petrella, as they drove
northward to keep a mid-day
rendezvous with the Chief
Constable. "Are all bank
managers like that?"

"They tend to clothe them-
selves in the armor of their own
rectitude," said Petrella. "But I
should think Mr. Wynne is an
extreme specimen."

"No wonder Marchant blew
his top. Old Wynne would have
saved the banks a few shocks in
the last seven years if he'd been
a bit more tactful with him,
wouldn't he?"

It was nearly four o'clock
when they first caught sight of
Fyledean Court. They had
taken the Tilshead road, across
the wastelands which form the
central hump of Salisbury Plain.
Then they had dropped down
off the escarpment, leaving
behind them the barren acres of

the Firing Range, back to the
civilization of the Lavenham
Valley. It was like coming out
of war into peace.

Fyledean Court lay at the
head of a long, curving, shallow
valley. A private approach road
ran north from the Lavenham-
Devizes road through unfenced
fields of stubble, sloping up to a
windbreak of black and leafless
trees.

At the turn of the road
Petrella stopped the car.

"You walk from here," he
said to Wilmot. "Keep out of
sight over the crest, and work
your way in from behind. Pick
up anything you can, while I
keep 'em busy in front."

He gave Wilmot five minutes'
start, then drove slowly down
the road to the Court, and rang
the bell. A gray-haired woman
answered the door, inquired his
name in a broad Wiltshire
accent, and showed him into a
room which might have been a
gunroom or a library according
to its owner's tastes. There were
a lot of bookshelves, but very
few books; a clutter of
catalogues, boxes of cartridges,
bottles of linseed oil, and tins
of saddle soap.

He sat there for nearly ten
minutes, listening to the life of
the house and farm going on
around him. A heavy truck
drove up, discharged some load,
and drove off again. Then

Douglas Marchant came in.

"My housekeeper tells me that you're a policeman," he said.

"Well—" began Petrella cautiously.

"Does that mean I can't offer you a drink?"

"There's no rule about it, but actually I won't have one just now."

"You don't mind if I do," said Marchant, and opened the large closet beside the fireplace. There were box files on the lower shelves, and a decanter and some bottles and glasses higher up.

Marchant helped himself to whiskey, put in a long splash of soda, and said, "Well now."

Both men were standing.

Petrella said, "I'm a Detective Inspector attached to New Scotland Yard. We've been investigating a number of bank robberies, which seemed to us to be connected—possibly organized by the same people."

"They're smart operators," said Marchant. "I've read about them in the papers."

"And I have a warrant to search your house."

Exactly the correct reactions, Petrella observed. Incredulity, followed by anger, followed by an affection of ridicule. But then, he had had ten minutes to think it all out.

"If it isn't a joke," said

Marchant, "and you really do suspect me of being connected with these—these bank robberies—would you spare a few minutes telling me why? If this house is full of—er—stolen goods—they'll still be here in ten minutes' time. Incidentally, I suppose that's one of your men I spotted, leaning over the gate at the back."

Petrella said, "Did you know a man named Light?"

"Jerry Light? Certainly. He was my Squadron Sergeant-Major during the war, and came in with me when I started a demolition and scrap metal business after the war."

"Have you seen him since?"

"I see him whenever we happen to work on the same contracts. He supplies labor. I supply windows."

"When did you see him last?"

"Two days ago—in London."

"Why did you meet him in an out-of-the-way public house, and not at his office?"

"I do much more of my work in public houses than in offices."

"I don't suppose you met Baron von der Hulde in a public house?"

Marchant looked surprised. "You keep dodging about," he complained. "I thought we were talking about poor old Jerry."

"Poor old Jerry," said Petrella softly.

"You must know—he was killed—a motor smash. The night before last."

"I knew," said Petrella. "I was wondering how you did. It hasn't been in the newspapers."

"One of his employees told a business friend of mine. These things get round very quickly in the trade."

"I'm sure they do," said Petrella. "Does everybody in the building trade also know that if Light hadn't been killed, he would have been charged with murder?"

Marchant stood up, his face went red and he said, "If that's a joke, it's in poor taste. I've told you. Light was my friend."

"So was the man he shot. Alex Shaw."

"Alex—"

"Or am I wrong? Wasn't it you who found Alex the job as chauffeur to your sister, Constantia?"

"Certainly. But—"

"Into whose hands, incidentally, quite a few stolen banknotes seem to have found their way."

"You're confusing me," said Marchant. "And you're going too fast. Are you telling me that Alex was a bank robber?"

"Alex was a very rare bird," said Petrella. One half of his mind was occupied with what

he was saying. The other half was noticing that Marchant was still standing up, and had put down his empty whiskey glass on the table. "He was a professional killer. Not just a muscle man, like Franks and Stoker and the other simple hooligans Light employed to run your dirty business."

"My business?"

"Yes. Your business. And that's really the oddest twist in the whole affair. Because, as far as I can see, you made bank robbery your business from motives of personal spite. You once had a good, legitimate business, and a bank killed it, so you decided to get your own back on all banks."

Marchant walked over to the closet, which still stood half open, took out the decanter, poured himself out a second whiskey, and then said politely; "Please go on."

"There's not a lot more to it. You were well placed, of course. As a demolition expert you knew all there was to be known about cutting through brickwork and steel. Light, I imagine, was your contact with the professional criminal element. You supplied the equipment, mostly from Germany, organized the whole show, and took"—Petrella's eyes wandered round the room for a moment—"I would guess, a very

handsome share of the profits."

Marchant said, "Is that your curtain line? I'm sorry. Really I am. I haven't met anything more fascinating since I stopped reading comics. Now—get on with your search, apologize, and be off with you."

The door opened, and Wilmot looked in.

"Sorry to interrupt," he said. "But I thought you ought to have this at once," and he thrust a piece of paper into Petrella's hand.

Petrella read it and said, "Thank you, Sergeant. Don't go away." And to Marchant, "That potato drill *that's just been delivered*. When you declared it at the Customs, did you tell them about the other piece of machinery?"

"What other piece?"

"Sergeant Wilmot hasn't had time to make a close examination, but he says that there appears to be a second piece of machinery screwed to the framework, inside the larger piece, and painted to resemble it. It looks like a high-speed metal drill. Curious requirement for a farmer."

"I know nothing about it."

"It would be an excellent way of bringing stuff into the country. You'd need some cooperation from the German manufacturer, of course."

"On a level," said Marchant,

"with your other fairy stories." But he was sweating.

He's getting ready to jump, thought Petrella. But which way? There are two of us here, now. I'm nearer the window. Wilmot's between him and the door.

"If you'd care to look at the declaration I made to the Customs—" He opened the closet door and the whole of the back of the closet hinged inward. Marchant went through it, and slammed the door behind him.

Petrella jumped at the same moment, but he was a fraction of a second too late. The closet door was shut, and immovable.

"Out into the passage," he said.

Wilmot grabbed the handle, and pulled, but the door held fast. The mechanism at the back of the closet must have bolted the passage door as well.

"Damn it," said Petrella. "He had that lined up, didn't he?" As he spoke, he was looking round for a weapon. There was a poker in the grate, but it was too small to be much use. He opened another closet and found a twelve-bore gun in it. He made sure that it was unloaded, then grabbed it by the barrel and swung the butt at the window.

It was a narrow, leaded casement, and it took five

minutes to beat an opening through it. Wilmot went first, and dragged Petrella after him. As they reached the farmyard they heard the airplane, and saw it taxiing out of the Dutch barn two hundred yards away.

"It's a Piper Aztec," said Wilmot. "Lovely little job. I spotted her as I came in. Take off and land on a tennis court."

"We ought to have thought of that," said Petrella. "With his record—an airplane was the obvious thing."

They could only stand and watch. The silver toy swung round, nose into the wind; a sudden burst of power, and it was away.

"We'll try the telephone, but I don't mind betting it's disconnected. The whole thing was laid out like a military operation. He went twice to that closet. Twice, in front of my eyes, to put me off my guard."

The plane swung back almost overhead.

"Once he gets to Germany we can whistle for him. Come on."

Wilmot didn't seem to hear him. He was still staring after the dwindling plane. "He won't get to Germany," he said. "I emptied his main tank. There'll be enough in the starter tank and Autovac to get him as far as the coast."

Petrella cut out the clipping from the *New Forest Advertiser*, and pasted it carefully into the scrapbook.

UNEXPLAINED FATALITY

The Piper Aztec two-seater aircraft, registration G/XREZ, which crashed on Tuesday evening at Christchurch has now been identified. The pilot, who died in the crash, was Wing Commander Marchant, D.S.O., D.F.C., of Fyledean Court, who has been farming in the Devizes locality for some years. Wing Commander Marchant was a popular figure locally and a generous contributor to all Service charities.

The cause of the accident has not yet been ascertained, but eyewitness accounts speak of the engine having cut out, which would suggest a mechanical defect or fuel stoppage. The pilot was evidently trying to land the aircraft on the local recreation ground. Tragically, he failed in the attempt by a few yards only, and crashed in the back garden of a Christchurch resident, Mr. Alfred Wynne, a retired bank official. Mr. Wynne's extensive tomato and cucumber house was entirely demolished.

This appeared the same day Petrella announced his engagement to Jane Orfrey.

Hugh Walpole

The Etching

Here is a quotation from W.A.B.'s *Introduction to MONSIEUR DUPIN: THE DETECTIVE TALES OF EDGAR ALLAN POË* (New York: McClure, Phillips, 1904):
"*...perhaps [the detective story's] prime importance is not as a distinct type [of modern literature] standing alone and tending to degenerate on the one hand into mere ingenuity and on the other into crude sensationalism, but [as] a factor in the development of the novel of Dickens and his school*". . . (written 67 years ago!).

Here is a story that tends to illustrate W.A.B.'s point in a most unusual way—a story by the famous literary figure about whom it was said that "no author of his time possessed his power to evoke horror without the least hint of the supernatural"....

But can you always tell, do you think? That seems to me by far the most difficult thing. After all, when you are married you hide the truth from the general world—whatever it may be, whether it is too happy to be told—people think you conceited if you are very happy—or whether it is too unhappy to be confessed. A confession of failure? Who doesn't hide it if he can?

But that is not exactly what you mean. You were referring to that mysterious Balance of Power. That old over-quoted

French proverb, about there being always one who extends the cheek and the other who kisses it, expresses it exactly. And for the outsider it is just that that is so difficult to decide. Women especially are so deceptive. How many adoring wives would slit the throats of their husbands tomorrow could they be certain that they would escape detection, and how many submissive and apparently devoted husbands would poison their wives tonight had they the courage?

I am not railing against

marriage—oh, no. When it is happy it is happier than any other state the human being is capable of, but it does offer splendid mediums for safe hypocrisies. And the deepest and subtlest of all, of course, are the hypocrisies that deceive the hypocrites themselves.

Take, for instance, the Gabriels. Mrs. Gabriel was a large, four-square, genial red-faced, gray-haired woman with bright blue eyes and a hearty laugh. She was one of the sensible women of the world—"A rock of common sense," one of her many women friends called her. You felt that she had not always been thus, but had trained herself, through many difficult years, to self-control. You might guess that she still had a temper, and a pretty violent one too. But no one ever saw it. She said that losing one's temper was a criminal waste of time.

She was rather like a man in her business sense, in her scorn of emotional trifles, in her comradeship with men, in her contempt for nerves. And she spoke to her husband just as one man speaks to another. "Shut up, Billy," she would say. "All that rot . . . you don't know what you're talking about," and Billy would say with a shy, deprecating smile: "All right, my dear, I'll shut

up." And he invariably did.

Some friends of the family thought her a great deal too "bossy" to Billy, but so long as Billy did not mind, was it anyone else's business? And Billy did not mind. He simply adored her.

They had been married for fifteen years or more. They were the same age—something over forty. Billy Gabriel was the manager of the Westminster branch of the London and County Bank. Mrs. Gabriel had a little money of her own, and they had, alas, no children, so that they were quite comfortably circumstanced and lived in a nice roomy flat in Harley House, Marylebone.

About only two things had there ever been any words between them—about living in the country and about spending money.

Billy would have adored to live in the country. His ideal happiness was to have a pleasant cottage—not too large and certainly not too small—somewhere not too far from London, but with a view (of hills, woods, and a stream), a garden and some dogs (Sealyhams preferred). He was a long, thin man with sandy hair, mild brown eyes, and a meditative mouth that often seemed about to break into a smile and then did not.

You would have said that he was a shy and timid man. You would have been nearly right—but not quite.

Their disputes over money occurred because, strangely enough, Mrs. Gabriel was inclined to be mean. I say “strangely” because it *was* odd that when she was so sensible about everything else she should be stupid about this.

It is stupid when you have plenty of means, no children, and another half who is in no kind of way extravagant that you should worry and complain about tram fares and seats in the dress circle. But Mrs. Gabriel had been brought up on very small rations indeed, and there is no one so seriously tempted to meanness as he who has had a penurious childhood and then made, or come into, money.

Nevertheless, all the friends of the Gabriels thought them a very happy and devoted couple. Of course, he was by far fonder of her than she of him. Anyone could see that with half an eye. She should have married someone with more personality than Billy, and, good man as he was, there were times, you could see, when she found it very difficult to be patient with him. She was fond of him, yes, but rather as a mother is fond of a disappointing child who *will* be gauche

and awkward in company.

Billy *was* shy and clumsy in company, but that was partly because Mrs. Billy made him so. She had begun in the early days of their married life to correct him out of sheer love for him and his funny, silly little ways. He was so unpractical (outside his work at the bank, where he was the last word in method and accuracy), so dreamy and, sometimes, so untidy. And he *did* love to bore people with long, endless, wandering stories in which really they could not be expected to take an interest, and so she began by checking him when she saw that other people were becoming bored, and soon it was quite a habit with her. “Shut up, Billy . . .

All that rot . . . Who wants to listen?”

And then he was so mild, she was so certain of his affection, he was so proud of her and submitted to her so readily, that she was encouraged to continue her “bossing.” She ran him completely. She used to like to wonder what on earth he would ever do were she to go away or be ill. But she never went away (without him) and she was never ill (never gave in to illness—she did not believe in such weak pampering). She was like an elder brother—an elder brother who would wonder sometimes how so stupid and

imperceptive a creature could have been born into the family. It was his imperceptions that called out her "managing ways" most frequently. The things that he did not see, the way that he idled his time, dreaming! How he would sit in the evening in their Harley Street flat just staring in front of him smoking his pipe, that smile so nearly there and never quite! Oh, it would irritate her sometimes, she must confess, when she was so busy, to see him sitting there and she would speak to him sharply and the dream would suddenly fade from his eyes and he would smile up at her (but not with the smile that was so nearly there and never quite) and hurry around and do some of the things that she told him.

Billy Gabriel was only half awake, and he knew it. It is very difficult to be fully awake when your work (and very interesting work too) takes up so much of your day (nine o'clock in the morning until six at night) and when, during the rest of the time, you have a wife who directs every movement.

Dimly Billy remembered a time when he was not so directed. Oh, but very dimly! He would not say though that he was happier then than he

was now. No, contrariwise. He was never tired of thinking to himself when he sat in the comfortable Harley Street sitting room, smoking his pipe of an evening, how fortunate he was. How fortunate that he, an ordinary unimportant kind of fellow with no especial talent for anything, no good looks, no clever talk, should have found a woman so splendid as Frances to care for him! That had been his first original impulse—a surprised, almost confused, choking gratitude. He had fallen quite naturally from that gratitude into subservience.

He was not as a rule a subservient man. He was not subservient at the bank, where the clerks were rather afraid of him, nor was he subservient at the "Twelve," a little dining club that met once a month, dined at Simpson's, and played dominoes afterwards. But he just worshipped Frances, and when she said that he was talking foolishly, why he *was* talking foolishly!

But was "worship" quite the word? He would have liked to think that out. One of the minor troubles of his very untroubled life was that he never quite had time to think things out. One could not, of course, at the bank, think of anything but the bank's affairs, and then afterwards, in the

evening, one was given scarcely time enough: one was just beginning to think when suddenly that rough, good-natured voice would cut across one's thought: "Now, Billy . . . sitting there with your mouth open dreaming again! Here, get up and help me with these books." And of course she was right. One must not sit there with one's mouth open.

But there it was. There was never time to consider whether "worship" was the word. Probably it was not. "Worship" implied some kind of tingling, breathless excitement, and certainly he felt no tingling, breathless excitement when he thought of Frances. Gratitude and admiration, but excitement, no.

But, then, where were the married pair who, after fifteen years of life together, felt excitement about one another? Comradeship, comfort, compatibility—but excitement?

Nevertheless, he was aware that had he had time to think about it, he would have been certain that he was only half awake.

One November afternoon he had, at the bank, a very bad headache. So bad was it (he suffered from dyspepsia and had eaten unwisely the evening before) that he made a sudden

and startling resolution. He would leave the bank an hour earlier than usual and take a walk. He had not done such a thing for years, and he felt quite shy (almost as though he were speaking to Frances) when he said to old Croffett:

"Croffett, I've got a head on this afternoon. I'll chuck it for today."

"Yes, sir?" said Croffett, putting his spectacles up his nose in a mild, comfortable way that he had. No one seemed to think it in any way peculiar, and, as he stepped out into the street, he wondered why he had not done it before.

When he had walked a little way his headache was very much better. He felt an almost schoolboyish sense of freedom and strode along humming to himself. He walked up Kingsway, turned to the left, and, after a little while, was outside Mudie's Library.

He stopped and looked in at the windows. He liked Mudie's; the books in those windows always looked cleaner and cheaper than the books in any other window. That was one of his ambitions—to have a library. He would never have one because Frances thought that buying books was an extravagance when you could subscribe to a lending library.

He moved up the street and

soon was looking at the gray pile of the British Museum. He liked the British Museum. He had a national pride in it. One day, when he had time, he would spend a whole day there and see the Egyptian mummies and the Elgin Marbles.

Today, turning aside, he saw suddenly a shop that he had never noticed before. It was a little shop with prints and drawings in the window, and there was something in the way that they were arranged that drew his attention. He went up and looked more closely and then discovered that to the right of the door there was a box and over the box was a notice: *No print in this box more than Five Shillings.*

Liking the comfortable shape of the shop, the way that the light from a neighboring lamp-post fell on a splendid chalk-drawing of a gentleman in a ruff, the air of comfort and ease that the brightly flaming interior offered him, he stood idly turning over the prints in the box. Another of his ambitions—in addition to the cottage, the Sealyhams, and the library—was one day to have “pictures.” Pictures in the vague, so vague and so impossible that he never breathed this particular ambition to anybody and for himself had scarcely formulated

it. He only knew that they were to be real original pictures. Pictures touched, themselves, by the hand of the original artist. None of your copies, no, not even those “Medici” things that looked good enough until you’d had them a day or two, and then were lifeless and dull. No . . . Suddenly his hand stopped. His heart thumped in his breast.

He was looking at a little landscape, a simple enough thing, a hill, a clump of trees, a cow, and a horseman. But how beautiful! How quiet and simple and true! And the real thing. Not a copy, although it was not a drawing. In the left-hand corner there was scribbled a name, Everdingin.

He went into the shop. A stout, rubicund man came to him. He held up his prize.

“That etching. Five shillings. A nice Everdingin that. Cheap at the money.”

Billy Gabriel paid his five shillings, his purchase was wrapped in paper, he left the shop. His heart was still beating. Why was he so strangely stirred? An etching, was it? Now what exactly was an etching? Was it a print? He thought etchings were colored . . . Driven still by a mysterious sense of drama he stopped in a bookshop and bought a little book entitled:

Prints and Etchings: All About Them.

Then he went home.

He said nothing to Frances about all this. The china clock with the red flowers struck nine, and suddenly he murmured something and left the room. Frances was busy at the rickety but smart bright-red wood writing table. She simply nodded without speaking. Then he crept across the passage as though he were afraid of something. He did not know that he was creeping. He opened the door of their bedroom and poked his head inside as though he were sure that he would find someone in there waiting for him. Of course, there was nothing but darkness. He switched on the light, and suddenly there were the two beds side by side with the pink rose coverlets, there the table with the swinging glass and Frances's ivory-topped hair-brushes, there the tall wardrobe that always tipped forward a little.

He was strangely conscious that he was seeing everything for the first time. Nothing before had ever looked as it was looking now. Very odd. He was as deeply excited as though he had come there to meet some woman. He went to the table with the shabby green cloth

near the window and picked up the two parcels. He unfolded the paper from the etching with the greatest care. Revealed, he placed it against a hideous purple flower vase. It stood there, softly, the hill, the trees, the cow, the horseman. Beautiful. So still, so quiet. Breathing the evening air. He could hear the stream running, could feel the colors withdrawing from the sky, leaving it chilly gray and pure. Soon dark would come and the stars sparkle above the trees and perhaps the moon would shyly appear.

He was lost in contemplation and did not hear the door open. Suddenly Frances's voice broke, scattering the stars, ruffling the stream.

"Why, Billy, what on earth are you doing in here? You ridiculous creature! I want you to come and find out those addresses for me. Why, what have you got there?"

She picked it up. It waved rather helplessly in the air as she looked at it from every corner.

"What an old mess! Wherever did you get it from? What a shabby old thing! Who gave it to you?"

"No one. I bought it."

"You bought it! How much did you give for it?" Her voice was suddenly sharp as she put the etching down.

"Five shillings."

"Five shillings? For that! Why, it isn't worth two-pence!"

He was surprised at his own anger. He was angry as he had never been in all his married life.

"Isn't it? That's all you know about it."

"Of course it isn't! Just like you to go dreaming along. I suppose you picked it out of some tuppenny box. As though we had money to throw away!"

And then suddenly she was indulgent. Her broad red-brown face wrinkled into smiles. "You silly old dear! What a baby you are! Why, I believe you're cross."

"No, I'm not." He looked sheepish.

"Yes, you are. Now confess. I can see it."

She went up to him and kissed him as a mother kisses a favorite child when the child after some little fault is forgiven. Many a time before had just this occurred, and he had always been happy at the little reconciliation, delighted at her generosity of soul. But tonight he was not delighted. He was still angry. She was treating him like a child. Scolding him for spending five shillings! After all, it was his money.

"It's a pretty good thing," he murmured, picking up the

etching carefully and placing it once more against the purple vase, "if I can spend five shillings without being hauled over the coals."

So astonished was she that she could only stare. Then she said:

"Why, Billy, I believe you really *are* angry."

"Yes, I am," he answered, suddenly turning round and looking at her. "That's a beautiful thing. A *beautiful* thing. What do you know about prints? Nothing at all. You just show your ignorance, that's all."

"And what do you know about prints either, I should like to know?" she cried.

"I know more than you do, anyhow," he answered, "if you say that's only worth tuppence."

It became a vulgar wrangle. They were both ashamed and suddenly ceased. They went into the sitting room and sat silent. When they went to bed they made it up. But she lay awake, wondering what had happened to him, and he lay awake seeing the thing through the darkness—the trees, the hill, the horseman.

He knew in the morning that he was different and would never again be the same man as last night. It was as though he

had fallen quite suddenly in love with a woman. But he did not analyze it. He only determined that he would keep it all secret from Frances.

Frances was instantly reassured. For so many years had she been able to manage him that it was not likely that there should be any change now. He was the same old Billy. He would be always the same. And she loved him. And despised him too.

Nevertheless, without knowing it, she did, through the next months, tighten the rein. Her dominance of him had been to her, increasingly, during all these years, a luxurious pleasure. Everyone fell in with it so completely. All her friends and all his adopted something of the same attitude to him—"Poor dear old Billy." Once, a number of years ago, a woman whom she knew but slightly had said to her: "You know, you bully that husband of yours—and you'll be sorry one day." Bully him! When she loved him as she did! She laughed at the woman and was careful not to see her again.

Billy, as though he recognized how unpleasant their little squabble had been, was now very sweet and submissive.

Meanwhile he pursued secretly his new passion. His life was changed. He was happy as

he had never been before. He bought six etchings—a Palmer, a Daubigny, a Legros, a Hollar, a Strang, and an Appian. None of them very expensive. The Strang cost the most—five pounds. But then he had never spent anything on himself. Why should he not? There was plenty in the bank. Nevertheless, he hid the six etchings and the Everdingin' with them. He hid them in the bottom drawer of the wardrobe, under his shirts. A poor place, but he had none better. He would go in, for a quarter of an hour, when Frances was engaged elsewhere, and look at them. He also bought five or six books, and read them with great attention. He subscribed to the *Print Collector's Quarterly* and hid also those numbers.

In the back of Frances's mind the little dispute remained. She would chaff him now, quite often, about "being an artist." She told other people, the Burnses and the Whimbles, "Billy's taken up art . . ." and they all laughed.

In her heart she was not quite comfortable.

The trouble of a passion is that it does not stay where it should. It mounts and mounts, especially when it is starved. Had Billy been a millionaire and able to wander into Colnaghi's and request them to find for

him a perfect Whistler "Venetian set" and all the green-paper Meryons in Europe; his passion might have flagged—which is one reason perhaps why millionaires are not, as a rule, happy people. But he held himself in for a long while, had only his seven, and so his passion fed on starvation.

But it was more than that. Here was something for which all his life he had been waiting as the one man waits for the one woman. He had not known it, but it was so. The love of these things, their personality, the intimacy that he had with them, put him in touch with so much other beauty. He paid secret visits to the National Gallery, to the Tate, to the Wallace Collection. All these years had he been in London, and how seldom had he been in these places!

He longed for the country—his cottage, his garden view, his rising hill and shining stream—so passionately that once at night when he was lying in bed and the room was dark, he stared in front of him, and it all suddenly arose there in its quiet and beauty as though he had it in his hand.

The six or seven books that he had bought had in them many pictures, and soon he felt that some of these lovely things were really his—*The Spinning*

Woman of Ostade with the bird cage and the sleeping pig; the Meryon *Morgue* with its tier upon tier of watching windows; Corot's lovely *Souvenir d'Italie* with its shimmer of light and color; Whistler's *Rotherhithe*, so strong and so delicate; best of all, perhaps, Van Dyck's *Van Noort*, the living, questing animal, spiritual comrade; these and many, many another.

Then, as stage followed upon stage of experience, he spent an hour or two every Saturday afternoon in the British Museum Print Room. The luxury, the heavenly luxury of these hours when the stillness settled all about you and you had, actually in your possession, the *Three Trees* and the *Notre Dame l'Abside* and the Whistler *Little Mast*. When he must go, he stood up and for a moment had to pull himself together before he moved, shifting from the one world into the other.

Frances for a time noticed nothing. She was so sure of him, of his absolute fidelity of body, soul, and spirit, that it must be something very serious that could disturb her. Then she wondered. The Saturday afternoons troubled her. He was always late for tea now, and gave her such absurd explanations, that he had missed a bus, been detained by an old friend,

and so on. Then one night, lying awake, she heard him talk in his sleep: "Oh, you beauty! You beauty!" he cried.

In the morning she laughed at her fear, but the fear grew.

Then, one day, she discovered in his drawer underneath the shirts the etchings, now ten in number. She drew them out, one after another, laid them upon the bed, looked at them curiously.

He had a secret, then. Whatever else might be true or false, this was certain—he was keeping something from her; he had been keeping something from her for many months. And if he was keeping one secret, why not another?

About the things themselves she had no right to be angry, so unimportant were they, but they gave her the opportunity to exercise her loving tyranny. She loved him so much—and by now much more since these last days when she had begun to suspect him—that to see him bend to her, submit, to feel his complete subjection and her security of him was an unceasing joy. The more unhappy he was, the more she loved him, knowing that soon she would forgive him and load him up with her affection.

So when he came home she, icily calm, took him into the bedroom. In her heart she was

smiling. She showed him the etchings laid out upon the bed.

A strange scene followed. He was unlike he had ever been. He was indifferent. He did not care that she should be angry. About what was she making all this fuss? It was true that he had bought these things and hidden them from her. He would have liked to hang them on the walls, but what was he to do? She had made such a silly fuss about that first one he had shown her that it was not likely that he would run the risk of such a scene again.

He did not look at her while he was speaking, but moved his hands restlessly as though he were waiting to protect the etchings against attack.

His indifference aroused her to a passion. She scolded and rated him, seeking always to see rise in him tenderness for her and love and gratitude. The moment that she saw those things her rage would die. She looked in his eyes, expecting. But they did not come. He hid his head and muttered the money was his own. Was he never to have any freedom? He was not a child.

She flung away in a tempest of passion.

Later—but on this occasion not until a day had passed—they were reconciled. They kissed, tears filled her eyes, and

as her hands touched his well-loved body and her cheek rubbed against his, she adored him—as mother, as wife, as comrade. Nevertheless, five minutes later, she spoke to him sharply just to reassure herself that he was hers as he had always been. He answered her mildly enough, but she knew that he was not hers as he had always been. A new period in their married life had begun.

Now she was always trying to bring him back “to heel,” and he was forever escaping her. The etchings were responsible. How she hated them!

She thought of them lying there, in the drawer, under his shirts. She wanted to say to him—she knew that it was the wisest way—“Bring them out, Billy dear, let’s hang them on the walls. Tell me about them. I will share this new interest with you.”

But she could not do this, partly because he had found this new excitement without her and therefore she was jealous of it, partly because she was afraid that if she encouraged him he would spend much money upon them, partly because she felt herself no interest or pleasure in them. If she liked pictures at all, she liked pictures with color. Something gay. These were drab and dull.

And then she had her pride. She must lead. Billy might rule in his bank, but outside that he must follow her. So she said nothing and he said nothing, and she knew increasingly with every day that she was being deceived, and he knew that she knew.

More and more in public did she laugh at Billy’s “love of art”—and more and more did the Burnses and Whimbleys laugh. Once she forced Billy to show his “silly etchings” to Mr. and Mrs. Whimbley, and how they all laughed! In another place and under another influence they might have admired, knowing nothing about the things anyway, but they always followed Frances Gabriel’s lead. She was such a sensible woman. They followed her lead now. They laughed and laughed again. Billy smiled but said very little. Then he went and put them carefully away in the drawer.

And Frances, when the Whimbleys were gone, was ashamed and miserable and angry. Her hatred of the etchings was now a flame.

Now she did not know herself. It was always nag, nag, nag. She must be at him forever about every little thing, about his clothes, his punctuality, his unpunctuality, the things that

he wanted to do, the way that he ate, the way that he did not eat—everything. And always she hated herself for doing it, wondered subconsciously at herself, saying to herself: "The moment that he looks at me with that old look of love and eagerness and wanting to be forgiven... That moment, I must have that moment..." But he did not want to be forgiven. He submitted, he allowed her to lash him with her tongue, then to excuse him for faults that had never been committed, to make it up with him, to embrace him, then to lash him again... But he did not ask to be forgiven.

Then suddenly, one spring evening, in a window in a little side-street shop, he saw Whistler's *Balcony*. A beautiful impression—he had by this time real knowledge—and cheap—one hundred and sixty pounds.

No, but the price did not matter. It was the thing itself. He had seen it before in exhibitions, in the Leicester galleries, at the British Museum, but this one was suddenly *his*—*his* absolutely as it looked at him out of the window, alive, begging to be taken by him, lovely beyond analysis with its strong arches, its deep water, its dark velvet-piled doorway, the gorgeous pageantry of the Balcony.

One hundred and sixty pounds. They could easily afford it. Only last week when discussing the possible purchase of a car he had said: "Well, that means two hundred pounds more," and Frances said: "Two hundred? What's that? We've got plenty in the bank."

They had. He had done very well since the war with his investments, and he had bought nothing—nothing really—for himself for years.

He went in and purchased it. He returned home with it under his arm as though paradise were shining on every side of him.

In his happiness he thought to himself: "I'll show it to Frances right away and insist that we frame it and put it up. If we do, it will make everything else look awful. Never mind. It's time we changed the furniture a bit. I'll have it out with Frances. She's bound to see how lovely this is. And so we'll make it up. It has been terrible these last months, all the quarreling..."

He went home singing. He went straight into the sitting room where she was writing letters.

He cried out in his happiest voice: "Here, Frances—see what I've got! Something you'll like!"

She turned, still sitting at the table. She had been missing him

dreadfully all day, determining that when he came in she would be loving and kind to him, and all the nightmare of the last months should be over. And now, to her own amazement, she said in a hard, hostile voice: "Well, what is it?"

She could see his face fall. Reluctantly now he undid the parcel. He held it up, dark and rich in its gleaming stiff mat. "Look," he cried.

It was an etching. She could have struck him in his face. It was as though he were deliberately taunting her.

"Another of those beastly things?" she said furiously.

His anger rose at once.

"If you can't see that that's beautiful, it's just because you have no taste—"

She got up. "How much did you give for it?" she asked, her heart thumping so terribly with love and anger that she could scarcely speak.

"A hundred and sixty pounds," he answered, challenging.

"A hundred and sixty pounds?"

"Yes. And it's worth two hundred at least."

"A hundred and sixty—!"

"All right," he answered roughly, "if you don't like it, you can lump it."

He left it lying on the table while he went out, brushing

past her, to go into the bedroom to wash his hands.

He touched her as he passed, and that touch inflamed her from head to foot. With one movement she was at the table, then had the Whistler in her hands, then had torn it, again and again and again, into a hundred pieces. As soon as it was done and the pieces had fluttered to the floor she felt sick, sick with a ghastly, trembling anxiety. What had she done and why had she done it? What did she care about the etching or any of the etchings? What did they matter to her? It was Billy who mattered. Billy whom she loved with every atom of her body, soul, and spirit. She could not move. She stood there, her knees trembling.

He came in. He walked to the table. In the first instant he did not realize. "What—!" he cried. "What—!" Then he was on his knees, fingering the fragments. Then on his feet he faced her with hatred in his eyes. He was going to strike her, then he stepped right back to the window.

"You're mad," he said, "mad. That's what you are. I've known it for months. You've killed that. It never did you any harm. It's *murder*... By God, I'll not be with you in the house another five minutes.

"You're a murderess, that's what you are!"

She broke out then, crying, pleading, supplicating. He did not listen to her. He went out. She heard the bedroom door close. She waited. A kind of paralysis held her. She could neither move nor speak. Ten minutes later she heard the bedroom door open and the hall door close.

Then, crying out, she ran, opened the door, looked at the lift, the gray descending stairs. The place was quiet as a well.

He never came back. He did not want to. He simply wondered how it was that he had stood her so long and why it was that he had never discovered that he did not

really love her. He took a charming cottage in the country, made a beautiful collection of etchings, grew fat, bullied his servants in an amiable kind of way, and was immensely happy.

She wrote again and again imploring him to return. Then she tried to see him. She never did. He gave her a very generous allowance.

She made the best of her life but missed him always. She longed for him sometimes so that it was like appendicitis or even a cancer. She will love him to the day of her death.

And why did he leave her? She can't think. She can't understand it at all. Some silly little quarrel about a drawing or a print.

All about nothing.



Patricia McGerr

The Washington, D.C., Murders

A fascinating tale of a series of capital crimes—and the deliberate pun is not intended to lessen the seriousness of this unusual story...

Detective: STAN MORRIS, City Editor

There are two schools of thought on the best way to begin a murder story. One says it must open with a bang—a beginning like, “A shot rang out, a woman screamed, and a man, blood dripping from a dozen wounds, staggered off the roof.” For advocates of that school, this story should begin, “The first body was discovered in the Lincoln Memorial; stretched in back of the huge Lincoln statue, a bullet through the heart.”

There is, however, a more leisurely method, designed to lead to the murder through a description of events far from the scene of the crime—as, for example, “Holmes drew the bow lightly across the strings of his violin, producing a plaintively melodic accompaniment to Watson’s account of his trip to Surrey.” Perhaps this would be a better type of opening for an

account of the sensational series of murders that terrorized the residents of Washington, D. C., and made sightseers tremble with fearsome anticipation as they made the rounds of its historic spots.

Let us, then, settle for the indirect approach and begin the story in the city room of the *Washington Daily Comet*, a tabloid with a small circulation and an even smaller reputation, but with aspirations that greatly surpassed its strongest competitor.

City Editor Stan Morris was reading his morning mail, the calm of the spring morning disturbed only by the rattle of dice in a far corner and the mumblings of a copy boy laboriously working the daily crossword puzzle with a stub pencil. One by one, Morris dropped announcements of an artists vs. writers ball game, a

lecture on mental health, and an outdoor concert into his already overflowing wastepaper basket. From the last envelope he drew a narrow slip of paper bearing only the words, *Sic semper tyrannis*. His eyebrows slightly raised as he read it a second time, shrugged, and tossed it, too, toward the basket. Fingering the change in his pockets meditatively, he rose and moved in the direction of the dice game.

Two hours and one edition later, he was back at his desk working on his assignment sheet when the phone rang.

"Yeah," he said into the mouthpiece. "Yeah. The Lincoln Memorial, you say? Sure. Yeah. Right away. Thanks for the tip, Chief. Sure, any time."

Banging down the receiver, he shouted across the room, "Get moving, Jimmy. Some guy's been killed in the Lincoln Memorial. A busload of school kids on tour found the body. Take Walter and get some angle shots of the corpse with the statue."

Jimmy and Walter had been gone almost half an hour before Morris had the thought that sent him diving toward his basket and scattering its papers in a frenzy of activity that made the copy boy stare in amazement. The return of the reporter and photographer

found him in a state of high excitement.

"Not much in it, Morris," Jimmy announced, unaware of the other's agitation. "They've identified the fellow. Nobody important. Worked in the National Archives. I've got all the dope."

"Not much in it!" Morris' voice was almost trembling. "We're holding the presses, Jimmy. This is the yarn of the year. Look what came in the morning mail."

Without much interest Jimmy accepted the crumpled paper and envelope.

"You know what that means?" Morris demanded. "That's what John Wilkes Booth shouted at Lincoln just before he shot him. It means the killer planned to re-enact the assassination and he sent the *Comet* an advance announcement. Give the story all you've got."

Jimmy caught some of his editor's fervor and wrote a great story but the reaction of the public was disappointing. They were, to put it mildly, skeptical. Their attitude was summed up in an editorial in the *Comet's* morning competitor headed *How Yellow Can You Get?* and denouncing the *sic semper tyrannis* note as an unethical invention designed to create sensation and to boom circula-

tion. Even the police, usually friendly to Morris, laughed in his face when he suggested lab study of the note and envelope. Since both were blockprinted on plain cheap stationery, it was perhaps not a serious oversight.

Investigation of the murder drew blanks for two days and even the *Comet* relegated the "police baffled" story to page nine. Then, on the third day, Morris was electrified to find on his desk, postmarked the night before, an envelope which in appearance was a twin of the earlier anonymous note. Opening it with trembling fingers, he again found a single slip of paper. This one bore the words, *An old place to pay new debts*. He stretched his hand toward the phone, but before he could lift the receiver, it rang piercingly.

"Yeah," he growled impatiently. "Morris here."

He listened a minute, his eyes widening.

"At the entrance to the Treasury, you say? Good Lord, Chief, listen to this. I just got another note—no, take it easy, Chief, this is on the level. But you've got to listen... Okay, Chief, I'll send a man over."

His spirits slightly dampened, Morris sent Jimmy out again to collect details. This time the victim was an employee of the

Government Printing Office. He too had been shot and his body had been found by a guard at the Treasury Department shortly after the doors opened for the day. The second murder, coming so closely on the heels of the first, made the public more receptive to the *Comet*'s style, and its story drew a parallel between this new homicide and the shooting of Alexander Hamilton, first Secretary of the Treasury.

The police, however, remained dubious and the paper's most dignified evening competitor carried an editorial on the ethics of journalism. Without mentioning the *Comet* by name, it suggested that one newspaper that resorted to forgery and the fabrication of evidence could degrade the entire body of the press. Morris writhed a little as he read it, since he yearned for prestige almost as much as for a soaring circulation. He began to wish that the unknown murderer had chosen some other paper for his gratuitous predictions.

Police Still Baffled, the headlines read the next day, and the next. No connection had been found between the two victims and none between the two crimes, except the use of a gun and the tie-in of each with a historical personage who had died violently. It was

probably the desperate need of doing something that led the police to accept Morris' suggestion that a man be assigned to the main post office to intercept all letters addressed to the *Comet* city editor—on the chance that, if the killer intended to strike again, his intent might be determined in advance. And late on the third night this precaution bore fruit.

Into the hands of the policeman at the post office came one of the familiar block-printed envelopes, with its slim contents.

This time the words asked simply, *Did George Washington sleep here too?*

There was activity in the Capital City that night. At least a dozen policemen were hidden in strategic spots around the Washington Monument. One manned the elevator, one waited in the tower, and two more lurked in the reception room. Jimmy covered this point for the *Comet* but Morris himself joined the detail that sped to Mount Vernon to patrol the house and grounds. The all-night vigil in both places ended without event, except that the city editor had to be forcibly restrained from striking a rival reporter who sneered, "Going home to write yourself another letter, Morris?"

Vindication for Morris and

the *Comet* was not long in coming. And when it came it left Washington in a state of shaking horror unmatched since Jack the Ripper roved the streets of London.

An early morning hiker striding along the highway that skirted the Tidal Basin, found a dead man lying at the foot of one of the cherry trees—a dead man with a hatchet in his skull.

Not everyone in Washington was interested in the *Comet's* interpretation of the cherry tree-and-hatchet legend, but everyone was appalled by the possibility that he might be next. The minority of Washingtonians allied with private business drew minor comfort from the fact that the newest victim was on the payroll of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. "You see," they reminded each other in tones that lacked conviction "the killer only attacks government workers. These mad murderers always run true to form."

The police now kept a constant watch on the *Comet*, staying in continual consultation with Morris. His glory was marred by only one touch of ignominy: they insisted on fingerprinting not only him but the entire newspaper staff.

"Of course we know you wouldn't go that far." The

police lieutenant tried to laugh it off. "But the department's been getting some phone calls. And you can't deny that this has been mighty good for your circulation. Anyway, no harm in checking, is there?"

So they compared the *Comet* fingerprints with those on the handle of the hatchet and gave the paper a clean bill of health. It was the only decisive action taken in the two days before the policeman in the post office intercepted a fourth note. This one said cryptically, *SO LONG!*

Bafflement was gross understatement as a description of the police at this point. The two words told them nothing. They had no idea where to go. The general public, on the other hand, were much more interested in which places to stay away from, but the note gave them no clue. Optimists drew comfort from its apparent finality. "It's a suicide message," they insisted. "The killer has finished his job and he's saying goodbye."

"He's saying goodbye, all right," pessimists countered, "but we're the ones who are going. Could be he's triggered some device that will blow the whole town off the map."

The night passed without developments. State Department cipher experts were put to

work trying to decode the new note. The Secret Service doubled its guard around the White House. Absenteeism in all government bureaus reached record heights. The morning wore on and no fresh corpse was discovered. But no one relaxed.

In the City Room of the *Daily Comet*, Jimmy's desk was piled high with files. Through long nerve-racking hours he'd sat up reading the victims' mail, seeking a link between them. It was a tedious assignment, but at last the hunch paid off. Like cards drawn to a straight flush, he slapped three letters down in front of the editor.

"I've got it, Morris!" Excitement overrode the fatigue in his voice. "Almost missed it because the letters seemed so routine. But he's the only man who wrote to all three and when you read them over they have a fanatic ring."

"O. O. Smith." Morris read the signature. "What's his angle?"

"He's a smalltown school-teacher who's written a book on American history. Worked on it for twelve years, then couldn't get it published. No wonder he cracked up. See—" Jimmy's forefinger underlined a key sentence. "I have original material and a new approach that will make all other texts

obsolete and will revolutionize teaching methods. Therefore, the publishers are in league to suppress my work.' "

"Then what's his grudge against civil servants? Why didn't he go to New York and start mowing down publishers?"

"He wanted the government to take it over, print it, and put copies in every public school and library. Each of these fellows got a letter from him and answered with a polite brushoff. He decided they were all part of the conspiracy. And he'd been living so long with history—don't you get it? He started reliving it!"

"Sounds logical," Morris nodded grimly. "The question is, how many other government offices did he write to? Who's next on his list of victims?"

Jimmy shook his head. "There could be a hundred answers. Maybe some general at the Pentagon refused to use his book for basic training. Or he might have asked the Information Agency to send it overseas. Name any department and I'll give you a tie-in. The only thing to do is headline the story and urge everyone who's had correspondence with Smith to get under cover and ask for protection."

"Yeah, that could work, so long as he hasn't already—"

Morris broke off in mid-sentence, repeated his own words. "So long as—so long as all his other notes had a meaning, this one must too. So—long. So—long. Wait a minute." He pressed his fist hard against his forehead as if to force thought. "Sic—sic—"

"You bet he's sick," Jimmy agreed. "The guy's a real psycho."

"I don't mean that. I'm thinking of the first message. *Sic semper tyrannis*. We translated it 'thus always to tyrants.' But we could have used 'so' instead of 'thus'—so always to tyrants. And now, 'so long'—Good Lord, of course, that's what he means! Why didn't I think of it before? What time is it?"

"Twenty to twelve."

"And the Senate meets at noon. Come on, let's get out of here!"

He pulled Jimmy after him to the door where they collided with the police lieutenant who was just coming in. They dragged him back to his car, scrambled in beside him, and ordered the driver to head for the Capitol at top speed.

"What the devil—" began the lieutenant.

"If we're lucky," Morris said breathlessly, "you'll have the murderer in a few minutes. If we're unlucky, you'll have a

dead Senator to explain. Fill him on the Smith letters, Jimmy."

The officer listened noncommittally.

"Sounds screwy enough to be true," he conceded. "But what's this chase we're on now? You know the next one he's after?"

"I don't know who," Morris admitted, "but I know *where* and how." ...

The car pulled up before the Capitol and Morris sprinted ahead of the others up the stone steps. Outside the Senate chamber there was the usual bustle of a session-about-to-begin, but it seemed today somewhat subdued. A cluster of high school students listened to a guide's lecture.

Morris stood for several seconds blinking at the change from bright sunlight. Then an elevator door opened and an elderly gentleman stepped out, flanked by document-bearing aides. Morris made a quick identification—Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee. Scheduled to speak on Federal aid to education. Naturally Smith wrote to him too.

Morris' eye caught a flick of movement from behind a pillar and he made a flying leap for the startled Senator, toppling him to the floor beneath him.

"It's the mad killer!" the students shouted gleefully, surging toward the fallen pair. "We've caught the mass murderer!"

A shot froze them to silence. As Morris dove at the Senator, Jimmy had sprung in the opposite direction toward the little man emerging from the shelter of the pillar. He reached him just in time to knock his gun arm upward so that the bullet that was fired lodged harmlessly in the molding above the elevator.

Almost simultaneously the police lieutenant, his own gun unholstered, moved in. Together they hustled Smith into one of the small private rooms before the spectators could begin to sort out who was attacking whom.

The aides helped the Senator to his feet and he felt gingerly for bruises.

"It appears that you saved my life, young man," he told Morris. "But I don't think I could survive many such rescues."

"Sorry to be so rough, sir." Morris identified himself, then added, "I hope you'll give the *Comet* an exclusive on how it feels to be shot at."

"You're entitled to that," the Senator agreed. "But what gave you the idea you'd find the assassin here?"

"He spelled it out in his last note," Morris explained. "So long didn't mean goodbye. The word 'so' means 'in that or like manner.' Here's the way the meaning works out: so long—like long—like Long—like Huey Long."

"Poor Huey," the Senator said. "I knew him well. It must

be thirty-five years since he was killed."

"That's right," Morris said. "Shot to death in the capitol at Baton Rouge on his way to address the Senate. And you were here in the Capitol on your way to address the Senate . . . Again he was making history repeat—in his fashion."

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Paul Gallico

The Roman Kid

A tour-de-force novelet that should become (if it already hasn't) a modern classic . . . by one of the most popular of contemporary writers, who has "confessed" that it never dawned on him that in "The Roman Kid" he had written a deductive detective story! . . .

Detective: TOMMY THOMPSON

"**B**on giorno," said Tommy Thompson. "Ubi est the—" he paused and then concluded that he had made sufficient concession to what he thought was the Italian language, and finished, "Could a guy take a gander at the Tertullian Fragment?"

The girl at the desk of the Antiquity Room of the Museo Romano flinched a little and then cocked her bright head to one side and repeated slowly, with a reflective pause after each word, "Could—a-guy—take—a-gander—guy—take—gander. Gander is the male of goose."

She stopped and looked at Tommy with the corners of her mouth drawn down and a sort of despair in her eyes.

Tommy suddenly realized that she had a face of infinite

humor, and that the humor somehow managed to disguise its beauty, or rather made you less conscious of it. Unlike the Italian women to whom he had already grown accustomed during his short sojourn in Rome, she had masses of soft hair, the color of early morning sunlight, large light-blue eyes, and a small nose. But Tommy felt that here was a person with whom one instinctively wanted to laugh. So he laughed.

"Excuse it, please," he said. "Maybe I ought to talk English. My Italian is terrible. I wanted to get a squint at that fragment of manuscript by the first Roman boxing writer. I read a piece about it in the Paris *Herald*. They're supposed just to have dug it up and it's the only existing description of an early boxing match. Some

Greek fed a Roman plenty of left hands and stopped him . . .”

The girl shook her head and said plaintively, “Why did they not teach to me the right kind of English?” Her mouth was thin, wide, mobile, and slightly pathetic. She was tiny and dressed in a long, blue smock. “I have taken very high marks in English, but it is the wrong kind. You are an American. Are you an archeologist?”

“Who, me? Jiminy, no.” Tommy grinned again. He was a pleasant-looking man in his late twenties with a broad, wide-open face and a strange two-inch patch of gray that ran through his dark hair from front to back. “I’m a sports writer. You know—boxing, baseball, and stuff. I do a column on the *Blade* in New York. But I’m a sucker for this ancient history. I’m supposed to be digging up a team of Italian amateur boxers to take back to fight our Golden Glovers, but I’ve been spending most of my time trying to find out what sports were like in ancient Rome. Very tough. If they had any columnists then, they buried ’em deep.”

The girl gazed at him, her face alive with intense interest. Finally she said flatly, “Americans are wonderful people. Come. I show you.”

She led him down an aisle between massive bronzes and pieces of ancient frescoes to a small alcove where there was a little pedestal holding up a flat glass frame. Under the glass was a small triangle of stained brown manuscript that looked like a piece of old rag. It was six inches across the top and about four down one side. Tommy could discern faintly the black brush characters on it.

“That,” said the girl, “is the Tertullian Fragment.”

Tommy stared at it and then said, “Oh, oh! I knew there’d be a catch to it. It’s in Latin, isn’t it?”

The thing Tommy liked about the girl was that she didn’t crack. An American girl would have said, “What did you expect it would be in, eight point Bodoni, with subheads?”

Instead she said gently, “I will translate it for you.” She leaned over the case, her eyes shining with interest and concentration, and read slowly in her fine, precise English with the slight accent that Tommy had not yet placed:

Falernus, the Senator, in his accusations, pointed to the scandal of the Emperor [Titus, the girl explained] who saved the life of Sinistrus his defeated boxer because of his love for Aula, the sister of the van-

quished gladiator. All Rome, he said, knew that Sinistrus deserved to die because by his defeat at the hands of the Greek, Phistra, a small but nimble boxer, who by the quickness of eye and hand and the agility of his legs remained uninjured during the combat, while inflicting many wounds upon his taller, stronger, opponent, the Emperor's gladiator drew the laughter of the multitude, thus bringing discredit upon the purple. Nevertheless the Emperor, with a glance at the box of the patrician Reglus, where sat the girl Aula, and in the face of the tumult of the mob demanding death for Sinistrus, who lay bleeding from many wounds as well as exhausted by his efforts, signified that his life should be spared. These matters, declared Falernus, were common knowledge...

The girl stopped and looked up. "It ends there," she said.

"Gee," said Tommy. "The little guy just stepped around and popped him. A sort of a Fancy Dan. I'll bet it was a lousy fight. I never saw one of those that wasn't. Maybe it was a splash. Titus sends his bum into the tank and then coppers on the bets. There was a dame angle in those days too, eh? Gosh, you know, you're won-

derful. You translated that at sight."

"Perhaps," said the girl, "you will return the compliment and translate for me too."

"I apologize," said Tommy. "I didn't mean to be rude. Whenever I start to talk fight, I fall into that jargon. They were funny guys, those old reporters. They didn't care a hang about the sports and never wrote about them unless there was some political angle to it—like this guy Tertullus. I guess when your space was limited and there weren't any printing presses, you had to stick to things that were important. Nobody seems to know much about what a show was really like at the Colosseum because nobody ever wrote about them. I guess they just stuck up a copy of the results and the box score somewhere in the Forum and let it go at that."

A tall, stoop-shouldered man came through a door that opened from a small office at the rear of the little alcove, and spoke to the girl in German. He was gray-haired, gray-faced, and weary-looking. He wore a gold pince-nez attached to a black ribbon. The girl answered him and then turned to Tommy. "This is my father, Professor Lisschauer, the curator of the museum. Papachen, this is an American gentleman who is

interested in the sports of antiquity."

Tommy shook hands. "Thompson is my name, sir. The *Blade*, New York. Sports writer. Your daughter was kind enough to translate the fragment for me."

The old man had a pronounced accent. He said, "Ja, ja. Leni haff just tolt me. You do not read Greek and Latin?"

Tommy shook his head. "I—I'm afraid what little education I have, I got the hard way. I mean I had to go to work when I was a kid."

The old man looked at him puzzled and then glanced sharply at his daughter.

"Then how can you be a student of antiquitation? It iss impossible."

Tommy felt uncomfortable. There was a detachment about the professor that shut him out completely. He did not want to be shut out. He tried to explain.

"I—I'm trying to get the feel of things. I mean the people of those days and what they were like. Behind all these inscriptions and statuary and stuff there were people—you know, human beings. They couldn't have been such a lot different from us. That fighter, for instance, I saw in one of those wall paintings in Tarquinia, squared off with his thumb stuck out ready for a left lead

to the eyeball. You could just see him getting ready to say, 'Excuse me, pal,' and then cross the right while the other guy is still blinking. He must have been the Gentleman Jones of Etruria. Gentleman Jones is a light-heavy we have around New York. Polite, smooth, and very sporting in the ring, but he loves to stick that thumb in the other guy's eye. What I mean is maybe those old-time fighters were just like that."

Professor Lisschauer looked baffled, shook his head, and said, "The reading of the ancients requires years of study." He sighed. "And then sometimes it iss nod enough. You are wasting your time. You will excoose me please."

He turned and shambled away. His daughter watched him go. On her face was pain and concern.

"Gee," said Tommy, "did I say something? I guess I'm just a dumb cluck. I didn't mean—"

The girl shook her head. There was a brightness in her eyes. Tommy saw that they were close to tears. "Papachen is in some trouble. That is all. He did not wish to be impolite. He thinks only of his work. Ach, if I could only help him..."

"Is it anything serious? I mean is there anything I could—"

Leni smiled. "You are kind. I am afraid you would not understand. His integrity. His years of hard work. And then to lose everything." She stopped. "Forgive me. It is private trouble. I should not bore you."

She hesitated and then suddenly asked, "Have you seen the famous statue of the *Resting Boxer*? It is in the Museo delle Terme." She raised her head proudly with a significance that Tommy did not understand at the time. "It is a discovery of my papa."

"I haven't," said Tommy. "But I will. Do you suppose you—I mean, would you go along with me some time to—to—"

"Take-a-gander-at it?" finished Leni.

"The once-over," said Tommy.

"The once-over," repeated Leni.

"A quick peek—"

"A quick peek."

"You're on."

"You're on. Does that mean yes?" Leni asked.

"Yes."

"Yes. You're on."

Their laughter joined and echoed from the quiet caverns of the museum. They took each other's hands on it. Something told Tommy that this was not the time to kiss her. But there

was nothing to stop him from wanting to.

They met two days later, on a bright, clear, warm spring Sunday, and went to Alfredo's, where Tommy, entranced, watched Alfredo's showmanship as he manipulated the Fetuccini in the melted butter, and later they ate his famous sole in white-wine sauce and exchanged bits of information about their lives.

The Lisschauers were Viennese. Leni's father, a famous archeologist, was the curator of the Museo Romano. Leni herself had studied with him for many years.

"Gee," said Tommy. "I knew there was something. My mother came from Vienna. My father was an American. And you can read the past as though it were a book. And yet you're sweet and simple. I've never met anyone like you. Shut up. Thompson, you're ga-ga!"

"Ga-ga?" said Leni.

"Soft in the head," explained Tommy, and then added under his breath, "about you," continuing aloud, "You must learn our beautiful language. I'll teach you if you'll help me with my ancient history."

Leni looked at him curiously with her large eyes. "You are a strange boy, are you not? You write about the sports and you

are interested in antiquity. I thought Americans only cared about to make money."

"I love it," confessed Tommy, "making money, I mean; but I don't let it get me down. What do you like to do besides read old Latin manuscripts at sight?"

"Oh," said Leni, thinking seriously and counting on the fingers of one hand, "I like to dance, to play tennis, to ski, to ..."

"That's done it," interrupted Tommy. "There's a tea dance at my hotel at five. What do you say we go and step?"

Leni nodded her head violently in assent. They toasted each other in Lagrima Christi on that ...

They kept meaning to go to the Museo delle Terme all through the afternoon. But there was such a fine blue Roman sky and the smell of flowers in the air—Tommy could not be sure whether it was flowers or Leni, who was dressed in a simple white frock with a little girl's sash at the waist, and a big straw hat—and also they acquired a cabdriver named Pietro Dandolo whose fine brown horse was named Ginevra.

Pietro sang snatches of operatic arias as he drove—sang them very quietly to himself. And although it was warm, he

still wore his rusty blue coat and shoulder cape and battered silk hat, and he sang his orders to Ginevra instead of speaking them, which was why Tommy and Leni grew to love him. Tommy engaged him for the whole day.

He drove them through the Porta Pinciana and the fragrance of the Borghese gardens to the Plaza de Popolo. From there they crossed the Tiber over the Ponte Margherita and went rolling along the muddy river past the Castel Sant' Angelo, and the Salviati and Corsini palaces. It seemed so natural that all the time Leni's hand should be in Tommy's, and their fingers intertwined.

Tommy told Leni something about himself and the curious life he lived in New York—the constant round of prizefights, baseball games, golf and tennis matches. At fifteen he had had to quit school and start in as an office boy in the sports department of the *Blade*. His father had been a singing teacher who had been ruined by the Depression.

Tommy's education had been continued by his father to the best of his ability. He had a talent for writing and had become sports editor and columnist and lived in an atmosphere of athletes, competition, and sweat. But in

Tommy too, there was a reaching for beauty, and a sensitivity to human beings and what made them tick.

The bright girl at his side was stirring a yearning in him, one that he felt unable to express, except in the curious language of his life and his trade. On her part, the girl was fascinated by the strangeness of this American, his vitality and animation, but with her feminine intuition she already felt the hungry, incompleteness of his nature and was drawn to it.

They recrossed the Tiber by the Ponte Palatino and drove back through the wonderful, shining city, past the great Victor Emmanuel monument and the Palazzo Venezia to the Ambassadeurs, where they went down to the little café below and danced Viennese waltzes and Tommy taught Leni American slang and she came to look with a fond joy for the wide grin that spread over his face when he interpreted.

"You're the tops. Get it? It means there was never anybody like you ever before. You're the Number One gal."

Leni repeated after him solemnly, "I-am-the-tops."

"Here's another one. Carrying the torch. When you're crazy about someone—like 'Baby, am I carrying the torch for you?' Get it?"

"I get it," said Leni, copying Tommy's intonation exactly. "Can I carry the torch for you too, or is the torch only for gentlemen?"

The whirling waltzes and the unity that comes from the perfect matching of rhythm and movement finished them. By the time they went to the famous Ulpia restaurant, hard by the Trajan Forum, for dinner, they were in love. They sat close together in the damp cool of the grotto below with the magic upon them, their hands tightly clasped, listening to the little orchestra, the guitars and mandolins and the blind violinist with the wonderful throbbing tone. The old grotto was carved out of the tufa of the buildings of the Forum. Dim lanterns faintly showed the garlands of spring flowers, the hanging basket bottles of Chianti, and the bits of old marble and pieces of ancient friezes.

Tommy said, "Gee, Leni, I've got a nerve to spring this on you this way, but I can't help it. I'm going for you. I've never gone for a gal this way in my life. Do—do I have to translate that for you too?"

Leni took Tommy's hand and held it to her cheek and shook her head that way, holding it. She said simply and directly, "Oh, strange, Ameri-

can Tommy. I am afraid that I'm going for you too."

"I want to kiss you," said Tommy. "Would anybody care?"

Leni looked at him with her eyes dancing like wood sprites. "This is Rome. The old gods would like it very much."

They kissed each other. They kissed each other again until the sweetness was no longer bearable. "Gee," said Tommy, "I heard the gods cheering..."

"I did too," said Leni, "only I think it was Benedetto."

Benedetto, the enormous proprietor, waddled over to the table with a bottle of wine. He said. "Bravo! Bravo! Signore, signorina, permit me, the compliments of the Ulpia."

"Looka," said Tommy, after they had drunk a toast with Benedetto, "let's get this straight now. I love you. I'll never love anybody but you. I want to marry you. But quick. I want to take you back to New York with me. I never want you out of my sight from now on."

Leni took his hand and said, "Oh, Tommy. I think perhaps I want to do so much..."

And then the dancing went out of her eyes and she caught her breath sharply and let go of Tommy's hand. He could see that something inside her had gone limp.

"Oh, oh—" he said. "Trouble. What is it, Leni? Is there another guy?"

The girl suddenly was frightened and a little panicky. "Oh, Tommy—I should not have let myself go so. It is so different with us here. It has been understood for so long that I will be the wife of Professor Zanni. He is Papa's associate. I know that Papachen wishes it. And we here are different with our families. Papa is everything. He would not understand you. And just now, when he is in such deep trouble. Oh, Tommy, I shall die..."

Tommy spoke a little grimly. "I get it. When I walk into Madison Square Garden or Twenty-one, I'm a big-shot, but in this set-up Mr. Thompson of the *New York Blade* is just John Mugg." He paused, and when he caught Leni looking baffled again, said, "Never mind, sweet, that's one I didn't want you to understand. Look, what is the trouble your dad's in? Tell me."

Leni said, "Oh, Tommy," again, and then replied, "It is about the statue of the *Resting Boxer*. The one—the one we did not see. Papa discovered it near the Fosso delle Tre Fontane. It was his great discovery. It is one of the most perfect bronzes ever found."

Papa has written that it is in the style and manner of the sculptor Praexus in the time of the Emperor Titus. Mussolini made Papa a Commendatore because the statue is of the Golden Age of Rome . . ."

"And so—"

"And so a Professor Guglielmo in Napoli has published a paper on the statue, against Papa. He is a very important man in archeology. He has written that the statue is—how do you say?—a—"

Tommy whistled. "I get it. A phony."

"Is false. Is a fraud. Three years ago the Manzini brothers were put into jail because they had made and buried many statues that were—that were phony, as you say. Now they are both dead. Professor Guglielmo has written that the statue my father has discovered is a fraud of the Manzini brothers."

"Well, isn't your dad's word as good as his?"

"Guglielmo is an important man in Italy. He is high in the party. And we are Austrians. And proof? What is there but that which Papa has from his years of study, from his knowledge?"

Tommy chewed on his lower lip. "And unless he can prove he's right, he loses his job. Nice. This guy you're supposed to

marry. Where does he figure in this set-up?"

Leni frowned. "He is terribly unhappy. He is afraid that Professor Guglielmo may be right."

"Just a pal," said Tommy. "And if your father goes out, he goes in."

"Oh, Tommy," cried Leni, "how did you know?"

"It's got a familiar ring to it, sweet." Tommy sighed. "At this point, enter our hero. And what does he do? He does nothing. On account of he's just a dumb sports writer. It's a fine plot, up to there."

"Plot, Tommy?"

"Mmmm. Boy loves girl. Girl's father does not love boy. In fact, he does not know boy exists. Girl's father is in jam. Buckety, buckety, here comes boy on a white horse, rescues father. Father says, 'Bless you, my children.' Boy gets girl. Only this one has me stopped. Cold. As a hero I'm just a columnist. Let's get out of here, Leni, and go for a drive. I want to cool my head off."

They filled their pockets with sugar for Ginevra, the horse. Pietro Dandolo was sitting on the box singing the "*M'appari*" aria from *Martha* to himself, so they fed Ginevra until he had finished and then got in. Pietro said something in Italian to Leni and started off.

"Where is he going?" asked Tommy. "Not that it matters on a night like this."

"He says because there is so big a moon, he is driving us to the Colosseo."

The indeed so-big moon shone through the skeleton of the Colosseum and illuminated the simple white cross erected on the spot where the Christian martyrs died. Leni and Tommy wandered in through the main entrance, their arms about each other's waist, picking their way around the pieces of fallen pillars and slabs of tufa and marble cornices. The great shell of the ancient arena was deserted except for the many huge Colosseum cats who lived there. Sometimes the moonlight picked up their eyes and made them glitter. The shadows seemed alive with their slinking figures, and sometimes their shapes were outlined, sitting on the long, broken columns.

Leni and Tommy sat close together on a drum-shaped slab of broken pillar and soaked in the feel of the place, the ancient quiet, and the beauty of the rising tiers of tumbled stone and the silhouettes of the arches.

Leni began to speak in her soft, expressive voice. "There, in the center, is the box where the Emperor sat. There was a great purple cloth that hung

from it. The patricians and the Senators were in the nearby boxes, according to their rank. In that little gallery above sat the courtesans. The plebs, the common people, were up at the top."

"The gallery boys," said Tommy. "I guess a chump had no more chance of getting a ringside seat at this show than a guy named plain Joe Doakes could crash the first five rows at a heavyweight championship fight at the Yankee Stadium."

"On days when the sun was too hot, or there was rain, there was a great canopy erected that covered the whole arena like a roof, a canopy of many colors."

Tommy grunted. "We're civilized. We let our customers sit out in the rain at Palmer Stadium and the Yale Bowl."

"They could let in water and cover the whole floor of the arena enough to stage sea battles, of which the Emperor was very fond. Have you seen the excavations at the other end? In the time of Titus the floor of the arena was many levels below this one. We are sitting on the dust of twenty centuries."

"I looked at them. You know what they reminded me of? The basement of Madison Square Garden, our big indoor arena in New York, at circus time. Runways for the animals,

cages, dressing rooms. And nobody really knows very much about the shows they put on here, or what it was like, do they, Leni? There is the Emperor's box. There sat the big-shots, there the girls. There was a canopy. Men fought with weapons and with their hands. Christians and slaves and condemned prisoners were torn to pieces by wild animals."

Leni sighed. "It is all so long dead, Tommy. One must be so careful of the records one reads into stones."

Tommy sprang up suddenly from the drum of the pillar and took a few steps into the arena. The floor was white with moonlight, and the gray patch that ran through his hair looked like solid silver.

He spread his arms wide with his fists clenched and shook them and cried, "But it isn't dead, Leni. Can't you feel it? All the people. There were people here. Thousands of them. Human beings. The place was alive with them. What's two thousand years? They must have been just like us, Leni, it drives me crazy. I want to see them. I want to bring this place to life."

He stopped suddenly, shoved his hands deep into his pockets, and began to pace, and the dark shapes of the cats scattered to the deeper shadows.

He spoke again. "This couldn't have been so different from what we know—World Series day, or fight night at the Polo Grounds, or the Harvard-Yale game at New Haven. Crowds coming in to see the show, pushing and gabbing... If you'll listen, you can hear the scrape of thousands of sandals on the ramps and that excited hum and chatter of a crowd going to a show. You would hear snatches of conversation. They must have talked in Roman slang as they went to their seats the same way we do—"Who do you like tonight? I've got a good tip on the third prelim. A new guy down from the north—they say he's a honey, fast and shifty... Is it true that Decius, or whatever he was called, is out of shape? They say he didn't train a lick. A wise guy. I heard the main go was in the bag. I got it from the inside. Friend of mine who knows the guy who trains the gladiators. I'm gonna have a couple of bucks riding on Drusus. He's a house fighter. Those guys haven't blown a decision yet..."

Leni was standing too, now, her face pale, reflected from the white ball of the nearly full moon that now hung directly over the black shell of the old arena. Her lips were parted with excitement. She did not under-

stand much of what Tommy was saying, but the feeling of it was reaching her. "Oh, Tommy. Please go on."

"Crooks, gamblers, sports, pickpockets, actors, writers, just plain people out for fun, guys with their dolls, and the dolls dressed and made up to kill—I've seen their paint pots in the museums—big-shot gangsters, lawyers—Rome was lousy with lawyers, politicians—the regular fight crowd. Why, you can work right back from the numbers on the portals, Leni. If they numbered the portals they must have had tickets that corresponded to the numbers."

"Yes—yes, Tommy. They were made of bone, I think."

"Then they must have had ticket takers and ushers. Probably political jobs. Maybe they even had programs—" He grinned suddenly. "Can't you see the program sellers standing under those arches and on the ramps, and by the stairways hollering, 'Get your programs here. You can't tell the gladiators without a program. Names and numbers of the Christian martyrs.'"

He threw up his head and gazed around the great amphitheatre to the entrance arcades. "And what about grub and concessionaires? There never yet was a sports crowd that didn't get hungry and thirsty.

There must have been venders selling things to eat and drink. What would the Roman equivalent have been of our hot dogs and peanuts and beer?"

"Meat on a stick, probably," said Leni. "Yes, and fruit . . ."

"They probably hollered just the same as ours. 'Get it red-hot here!' And wine—"

"The *vinarii*," interrupted Leni, almost breathless, "the wine merchants. They carried it around in skins . . ."

"Red wine and white. Didn't they used to cart snow down from the mountains to cool it? 'Ice-cold, ice-cold, ice-cold! Get your ice-cold *vinio* here, ten cents a cup. Who'll have a cup? Sweet or sour, sir?' Noise, cries, excitement, and maybe the bums up in the two-bit seats stamping their feet because they wanted the show to begin. And the guys selling souvenirs. 'Show your colors.' The blue and the white. Hawkers, with blue ribbons and white ones. 'Show your colors, folks. What's your favorite?'"

"Oh, and little clay figurines of the gods," breathed Leni, "for the good luck."

"Sure. And statuettes of the favorite gladiators to carry or tie to your tunic the way the gals who go up to New Haven for the Army-Yale game pin a little bulldog or Army mule to their coats."

"And girls selling garlands of flowers to throw into the arena to the victors," Leni said. "There they stand, with flowers in their dark hair, and the garlands over their arms. . . ."

Tommy put his arm around Leni's shoulder and pointed to the vast floor of the arena. "They had to get ready, didn't they? Set the arena for the show? There are the roustabouts—slaves, I suppose—marking off the combat areas, looking after the props, preparing the boxes of sand to cover up the bloodstains. There'd be the officials, and judges and referees and masters of ceremony, dressed up to kill and strutting like an A.A.U. official in his hard hat at a big track meet. Officials are all alike.

"The crowd is sifting to its seats. People are visiting from box to box, laughing and making bets. Whistling breaks out from the top tiers as a gladiator comes out to try the footing and look at the direction of the sun so that if he wins the toss he can get it to his back. I guess man could whistle from the time he had a mouth.

"And can you get an idea of the dressing rooms below? The taping and bandaging and last-minute advice to the fighters, and the swordsmen limbering up and doing knee

flexes and lunges and making passes with their short swords, and the boxers shadow-boxing to warm up, the way every fighter has since guys first put up their dukes, and whistling their breath out of their noses as they punched at the air.

"And I guess maybe down in the dungeons the Christians were on their knees, quietly praying, and the other doomed stood by and watched them. And sometimes over the noise of the crowd and the cries of the candy butchers and wine sellers and hawkers you would hear from deep down the impatient roaring of the hungry beasts, the way sometimes when the circus is in the Garden and there is a sudden lull and you hear the lions from down below. . . ."

Leni was crying, "Oh, Tommy, Tommy, you have made this place of the long ago so alive. . . ." Her eyes were shining, and now she too stood with her head thrown back and her arms outstretched toward the slender white cross. "These things were so. They were. Oh, they were."

Suddenly she stopped short and spun around facing the man and cried sharply, "Tommy!"

Tommy was startled. There was such a strange look on her face. Her eyes were so wide. "Sweet, what is it?"

The girl suddenly placed both hands to her temples and held them and spoke in German. "*Ach, lieber Herrje! Es ist nicht möglich—aber doch—doch—*"

"Honey, what's happened?"

Leni ran to him. "Tommy, you must come with me at once. But at once. It is still early. You will come with me. I have had—oh, how do you say it? Something inside of me, all through me."

Tommy held her off. "Is it a hunch, honey?"

"Oh, yes, yes, Tommy. Is that the word? Something inside of me has told me something."

"Do you want to tell me about it?"

Leni shook her head. "No—no. Not yet. But you will come..."

She took him by the hand and together they ran out of the arena, frightening the cats again. Pietro was so startled that he stopped in the middle of the Toreador song.

"*Trenta, Via Palestro, e presto!*" ordered Leni. They scrambled into the carriage, and a surprised and startled Ginevra rattled them over the cobblestones and onto the smooth asphalt of the Via del Impero, at what, to the best of her recollection, was a gallop.

Leni said, "I do not want to

say yet, Tommy. Just hold me, please."

The address was a private house, not far from the Museo Romano. "Our home," Leni said. She still had Tommy by the hand as she rang the front doorbell. A pleasant-faced elderly woman in a black dress and white apron came to the door. Leni said breathlessly in German, "*Ach, Liesel. Is Papa still up?*"

The woman replied, "He is not at home, Miss Leni. The Conte Alberini came. They both went away together. I believe they were to go to the Museo delle Terme."

Leni wasted no time. She cried, "Come. Oh, if it is not too late. *Presto, Pietro, al Museo delle Terme.* The little door on the Via Gernaia side..."

Ginevra, thoroughly outraged, clattered them past the huge gray Station Centrale, whipped them around a corner on two wheels and deposited them before a tiny iron door in a high, thick wall. Leni seized a bell pull and jangled a bell wildly and then pounded with her little fist so that the iron door rattled and clanged.

The door was finally opened by an ancient attendant in a faded blue uniform coat.

"I am Leni Lisschauer, Professor Lisschauer's daugh-

ter," Leni said. "Is my papa here?"

The attendant nodded. "*Si, si, signorina*. It is a little irregular. We are closed. They are all on the second floor with the Conte Alberini. You may come."

He had an old lantern, and by its dim rays he led them, Leni still clinging to Tommy's hand, through a garden in which were many shadowy statues, to the dark and gloomy museum built on the site of the old thermal baths. It grew lighter as they went up the stairs to the second floor. The room at the far end of the museum was illuminated and they heard voices coming from it.

Leni, still towing Tommy, broke into a little run. They burst into the room. The four men there turned and stared.

One of them was Professor Lisschauer. He looked very old. The second was tall and dignified, with a black beard and a monocle. With him stood a short, fussy, bald-headed little man wearing a pince-nez. The fourth was a thin man with a narrow face and long black hair combed back from a high forehead.

But the thing that caught Tommy's eye was not so much the men, but the great bronze on a marble pedestal in the

center of the room. It was the figure of a naked man seated, his arms resting on upper legs, his hands encased in the iron-studded, hard-leather cesti worn by the ancient pugilists, with thongs extending halfway up to his elbows and ending in a tight leather cuff.

His head was turned to the right looking up over his right shoulder. He was curly-headed and bearded, heavy-muscled. He had been through a terrific battering. On his right shoulder and right elbow and in the crisscrossed thongs of the right forearm were three deep and gaping cuts. His ears were cauliflowered, ballooned, and cut. His nose had been smashed to one side and cut, his lips puffed, his cheek-bone swollen and gashed. His eyes showed the heavy ridges of the professional prizefighter, and traces of old scars as well as new wounds. The cesti, which were thick and about two and a half inches wide, covering the knuckles and letting the fingers protrude, had sharp cutting edges, and the two halves were held together around the hand with narrow strips of iron.

The thin man with the lank black hair made a little movement toward Leni, but her father was the first to recover. He spoke to her in German.

"Leni! What are you doing

here? Who is this man? Ah, yes, he was at the museum. I remember. But why?" He stopped, turned to the group, and said in Italian, "Forgive me. Count Alberini, I believe you have met my daughter. Professor Guglielmo, my daughter Leni."

Leni introduced Tommy. The bearded, monocled man was Count Alberini, State Director of Museums and Art; the fussy little bald-headed man was Guglielmo. The thin, narrow-faced one with the long hair was Armando Zanni, Lisschauer's assistant. Then she turned to her father. "Papachen, what has happened?"

"It is all over, my child. Count Alberini has accepted the statement and the testimony of Professor Guglielmo. The Manzini brothers were once known to have made a statue of a boxer. Zanni has had no alternative but to agree with him. I have given my resignation. The Count has been very kind. He brought Professor Guglielmo here from Naples to confront me and give me a last chance to prove my case. I could not."

Leni turned to Tommy quickly in pain and in panic, and translated what her father had said. The Count was coughing discreetly and then spoke softly and deprecatingly

in English. "Your pardon. But this is indeed a very private matter. This young man—" He looked inquiringly at Leni.

The girl turned. "He is an expert—" She was very close to tears.

Professor Guglielmo removed his pince-nez and cocked his head to one side and asked, "Of antiquity?"

"No," cried Leni, her young voice ringing defiantly through the room. "No! Of life!" Suddenly she turned to Tommy and wailed, "Oh, Tommy, Tommy! Do something! Make him live. Bring him to life for me the way you did the old people of the Colosseo. Tommy..."

Tommy caught her by the shoulders and said, "I get it. Keep your chin up. I get the picture." He faced the group of men. "Do all of you gentlemen understand English?"

They all bowed. Zanni said, "But naturally. It is a part of education."

"Good," said Tommy. "Anything you don't understand Leni will translate for you. She's onto my jargon." He grinned pleasantly at Zanni. "Education sometimes has its limits. Leni, tell all these guys to keep their shirts on. I want five minutes with this old chap. Maybe I can help."

He stepped out of the circle

and walked slowly over to the statue while the four men and the girl stood watching him. He spoke to himself very slowly as he stood in front of the great bronze, his hands in his pockets, his head cocked a little to one side.

"The Roman Kid, eh? What a licking you took! . . . Gee, shave off those whiskers, and you could be Paolino sitting on the rubbing table in the dressing room at the Yankee Stadium after Max Schmeling got through with him. What a pasting! . . . That's a lovely pair of tin ears you've got, my friend. You just never bothered to duck, eh? What a job, what a job! . . ."

He commenced to circle the statue slowly, examining it minutely. He fingered the three cuts on the right side, went suddenly to the other side and examined the left arm, whistled, and said, "Oh, oh, sidewinder!"

He inspected the hands carefully and then hopped up on the pedestal, fingered and examined the cuts on the face, the bruises and abrasions and scars. He jumped down to the floor again, and suddenly fell into a boxing stance, looked at the statue again and changed it, and then walked rapidly around it again. Once he addressed himself to Count Alberini.

"These cuts," he said, "are definitely cuts? Not accidents? Ages of being buried, or being tossed around?"

"We do not believe it has been buried for ages," the Count replied with a little smile, "but the cuts and marks were all placed there by the sculptor."

"Thanks," said Tommy. "That's all I wanted to know."

He made one more circle around the statue and then backed away from it with a little gesture of salute and said, "Thanks, pal. There's been many a guy since your time who's had his ears pinned back just the way yours were."

He turned and faced the group, uttered something out of the corner of his mouth to Leni that sounded like "Buckety, buckety," and then said with a fine, studied, dramatic carelessness that delighted him, "Gentlemen, what would you like to know about this guy?"

It was old Professor Lischauer who grasped at the straw. He said, "What? Is there anything you can tell us?" There was deep despair in his voice, which made Tommy suddenly ashamed of his fine pose. He dropped it.

"Plenty," he said grimly. "In the first place, the guy was a southpaw."

"A which?" inquired Profes-

sor Guglielmo politely.

"Portsider. He was left-handed. I'll bet most guys hated to fight him. Nobody likes to fight a southpaw."

Count Alberini looked interested. "So?" he said. "How do you determine this?"

"Looka," said Tommy. "You can't miss it." He stepped up to the statue, took a pencil from his pocket, and used it as a pointer. "Here! Deep cut on right shoulder. Another on the arm just below the elbow. Another on the forearm inside the lacings. No cuts on the left shoulder or arm whatsoever. Here's how the orthodox boxer stands—" Tommy fell into the regular stance, left hand, left foot forward. "Here's how this guy stood—" He reversed his position and stood with his right foot forward, right arm extended and curled, left arm bent at his side. "Get it?" he said. "The reason he has those cuts on the right arm is because that is the part of him that was the closest to his opponent."

For the first time light came back to Leni's face. The Count solemnly walked over to the statue, inserted his monocle in his eye, inspected the three cuts one after another, assumed the left-handed boxing stance that Tommy had taken, straightened up, slapped his thigh, and said, "*Per Bacco!*"

"Uh-huh!" said Tommy. "And anyway, the guy's had a busted left duke-hand, I mean. That artist didn't miss a thing. Here, you can see the swelling where it knit badly. He used the left for the Sunday punch. That would be the one most likely to go. All right. He wasn't a boxer. He was a slugger. All he wanted to do was to get in close enough to lay in that left—which meant curtains. Get it?"

Guglielmo walked over, adjusted his pince-nez, and said, "You can explain that?"

"Look at the ears on him," said Tommy. "Guys who can box don't get marked up that way. This guy's had a hell of a licking. All those bums who take five to give one wind up with pretzel ears and scarred eyebrows. He's got the musculature of a slugger too, and the legs. Here, look at all these heavy muscles behind the shoulders and down the back, and on the arms. The fast boxer and snap hitter has slender shoulders and tapering muscles. And anyway, the cuts on the arm again tell you that. Look here, Professor, let me show you. Square off in front of me."

He got Guglielmo in a boxer-like attitude. The little old man seemed to like it and tried to look fierce and belligerent. Tommy ranged him-

self opposite him in the left-handed stance, but with his right arm and fist completely extended in front of him, and the left cocked at his breast.

"I can keep you off in this way. But this guy fought with his right arm curled in front of his face like a shield as he shuffled in. That's how he got those cuts where they are."

Guglielmo practiced a little, transformed himself into a slugger, examined the statue, went into a pose again, straightened up, looked at Alberini and said, "*Mirabile! . . . E vero . . .*"

Leni clapped her hands. "Oh, Tommy, bravo!"

Professor Zanni shrugged and said, "In the realm of pure conjecture. . ."

Tommy threw him a look, licked his lips, and spoke again. "Now if you'd like," he said, "I think I can tell you something about the guy who whipped him. The sculptor who did this made his sketches in the dressing room or in the arena, immediately after the fight. Now—"

Zanni suddenly showed even, white teeth. "Just a moment, my friend. How do you know he lost the fight? Perhaps he was the winner, no?"

"Zanni," said Tommy, "you ought to read a book. It'll

broaden you. Do you admit that he was sketched immediately after a fight?"

"If the statue were genuine, I would. The artist has been so careful to include every mark with nothing omitted. But he might still have been the winner."

"Then the sculptor would also have been careful enough to include the victor's chaplet or garland which would have been on this guy's head if he'd won," said Tommy with his most charming smile.

"Bravo!" said Alberini and Guglielmo in unison.

"*Herrlich!*" said Professor Lisschauer. He moved over toward Alberini and Guglielmo. There was a little gleam of hope in his tired eyes.

"Thanks," said Tommy. "All right, then. The little guy who licked him was probably a Greek. He—"

It was Zanni who interrupted again with a laugh. "Hah! No, no, my friend. That is now pure fancy. You have the true American imagination."

"You sure root for the home team, don't you, Zanni?" Tommy said.

"I do not understand this expression."

"Leni does," suggested Tommy. "Maybe you've read a book, but not the right one."

There's one over in the library of the American Academy I can refer you to. Professor Stoddard gave it to me. It tells how the Greeks never punched for the body. They were purely head punchers. This guy hasn't a mark on his body. But look at his kisser. The Greeks, from all I can find out, were much better boxers than the Romans. And make no mistake. The guy who gave the Roman Kid his pasting was a little sweetheart. He kept fighting on a bicycle, and—"

Even Leni joined in the unison chorus, "A bicycle?" They were all hypnotized.

Tommy grinned. "Excuse me. That's one I haven't taught you yet, Leni. He fought in retreat. He knew he had to stay away from this guy or get killed."

"Why do you say a small man?" asked Guglielmo.

"Figure it out," replied Tommy. "Small men are fast. Big guys are slow. This guy is still alive, isn't he? If his opponent had been a big, fast guy with a punch, he'd be dead instead of sitting there. You could cave in the side of a guy's head with one of those things he has on his hands. But the Greek was fast enough to keep away, and probably smaller. He either didn't have a punch or he was afraid to get close enough

to let one go. And the direction of the cuts and bruises on the Kid's face indicate that the Greek hooked, or punched up at him, and therefore was smaller.

"Look at the condition of the right side of the Kid's face, compared to the left. The Greek probably let him have a few right-hand smashes when he had him woozy. But he was a smart little guy and he knew how to fight a southpaw, which is more than most of our fighters do today. He kept moving, circling to his own left and the Kid's right, away from that deadly left hand, and as he circled and backpedaled, he kept popping him with left hooks—look at the way his nose is bent, the size of his right ear, and the mess he made out of the right side of his face.

"Even so, he didn't want to risk getting close enough to finish him. He had the fight won, so why take a chance? He just popped him with that left until the southpaw collapsed from the accumulation of punches, loss of blood, and exhaustion. Afterwards—"

Leni suddenly placed her hand to her face and let out a scream.

Her cry echoed through the high, empty vaults of the deserted museum.

"Tommy! Papa!" She was

staring. "The Tertullian Fragment! The description . . . Tommy! Papa!"

They were all talking and shouting at once, Alberini crying, "*Corpe di Bacco*," Guglielmo saying over and over, "*Si, si, si, ma si, si-si. . .*" and Professor Lisschauer, "*Lieber Herr Gott. Aber gewiss. . .*"

"I don't get it," said Tommy.

"The Fragment!" cried Leni. "The description of the boxing match before Titus!"

"Holy smokes!" said Tommy. "I had forgotten it."

"The name—the name!" cried Professor Lisschauer. "Sinistrus, the Left-handed One. It iss. It iss. You haff here before you Sinistrus, Roman boxer of the Emperor Titus, defeated by the little Greek, Phistra, and granted his life because of the love of the Emperor for his sister Aula."

It was not strange that Leni and Tommy should be hugging each other, but it was a little unusual that Lisschauer and Guglielmo should be in each other's arms, and patting each other on the back, until the little man suddenly stepped back and cleared his throat and said, "I must have leave to speak. Count Alberini, Professor Lisschauer, I withdraw. I apologize. I have done a great injustice, though my intent was

honest. I was wrong. The Manzini brothers have been dead two years. The Tertullian Fragment was discovered less than six months ago. They could not possibly have known of its contents. I hope that I will be forgiven. For my friend Professor Lisschauer I have the greatest esteem and admiration."

The Count adjusted his monocle and said, "Professor Guglielmo, it is no more than I expected from a man of your attainments and generosity. The resignation of Professor Lisschauer is, of course, not accepted."

Professor Lisschauer somehow made a magnificent job of not seeing where Leni had just been. He came to Tommy and said, "I wish to thank you from the bottom uff my heart, and to make to you my apologies for my attitude and my ignorance in the museum that morning. We are all too far from the realities of life. You have shamed us all . . ."

Tommy said, "Gee—don't—it catches me in the throat . . . I'm—I'm just a dumb guy who happens to have been around fights and fighters all his life . . ."

There was a pause. "I am so happy," said Professor Lisschauer, "I could to sing and cry. We will go to my house, all,

and - drink some wine. Mr. Thompson, Count Alberini, Guglielmo, Zanni." He stopped. "Where has gone Zanni?"

"Zanni," said Tommy succinctly, simply, "has taken a powder."

They all looked blank, but Tommy didn't explain. They moved off down the long aisles

of glass cases and marbles and bronzes toward the stairs. When they reached the darker portions and the attendant went ahead of his lantern, Tommy did what was requisite.

"You know," said Leni, when she could speak again, "I—I think perhaps boy is going to get girl . . ."



Georges Simenon

Le Chateau de l'Arsenic

When we think of Georges Simenon in terms of a detective character, we naturally and instantly think of the nonpareil Inspector Maigret. But it should not be forgotten that Georges Simenon created other important detectives, including Monsieur Frôget, G. 7, Joseph Leborgne—and Jean Dollent, the Little Doctor...

Detective: JEAN DOLLENT, The Little Doctor

He hesitated a moment. Then he stood on tiptoe and rang the bell. He was a small man, and the bell was situated in an abnormally high position. The Little Doctor knew that he was being watched—not only from inside the château but from the houses in the village, where they must be wondering who, at such a time, would dare to ring this bell.

He was in a village in a clearing in the forest of Orléans, but the clearing was rather small for the château and the few surrounding cottages. The forest seemed to overflow, stifling the village, and you felt that the sun had difficulty in getting through the thick branches. A few thatched roofs,

a grocer's shop, an inn—all low, narrow houses—and then the château, too large, too old, falling to ruin and looking like an impoverished aristocrat in rags, but rags which had once been well cut.

On the first floor a curtain moved. A pale face appeared for a moment at one of the windows.

Finally, a servant came to the door. She was a girl of about twenty to twenty-five, pleasant-looking, prettier than you would have expected to find in such a place.

"What do you want?" she asked him.

"I want a word with Monsieur Mordaut."

"Have you an appointment?" she asked.

"No."

"Are you from the Public Prosecutor?"

"No, but if you would be good enough to give him my card..."

She went away. A little later she came back with another servant, a woman of about fifty with a forbidding face.

"What do you want with Monsieur Mordaut?"

Then the Little Doctor, despairing of ever passing this closely guarded gate, spoke frankly. "I have come about the poisonings," he said, with the same charming smile he would have used to give someone a box of chocolates. The face had reappeared behind the first-floor window. Probably Monsieur Mordaut.

"Come in, please," he said. "Is that your car? You had better drive it in too, or the children will soon be throwing stones at it."

The drawing room, like the exterior of the château, was sad and dusty. So also was Monsieur Mordaut in his long, old-fashioned jacket, and with his sunken cheeks covered by a lichen-like, short, dirty gray beard.

"Good morning, sir," said the Little Doctor. "I must apologize for having almost forced an entry, particularly as

you have probably never so much as heard of my name."

"No, I haven't," said Monsieur Mordaut with a shake of his head.

"Well, sir, as others are interested in handwriting or palmistry, I have a passion for human problems—for the puzzles which, in their early stages, are nearly always crimes."

"Pray continue."

"I have been extremely interested in the rumors which have been current for some time about you and this château. I came here to discover the truth; that is to say, to find out whether you murdered your Aunt Emilie Duplantet; then your wife, who was Félicie Maloir before you married her; and lastly your niece, Solange Duplantet."

It was the first time that the Little Doctor had addressed such a speech to another human being, and his nervousness was aggravated by the fact that he was cut off from the world by a long corridor, with innumerable doors leading off it. Monsieur Mordaut had not stirred. At the end of a long piece of black cord he swung an old-fashioned eyeglass; his expression was infinitely sad.

"You were right to speak frankly... Will you have something to drink?"

In spite of himself the Little

Doctor shivered. It is somewhat disconcerting to be offered a drink by a man you don't know, and whom, in a slightly indelicate fashion, you have just accused of being a poisoner.

"Please don't be afraid. I'll drink out of the bottle before you. Did you come by the village?"

"I stopped at the inn for a minute to book a room."

"That was unnecessary, Monsieur... Monsieur..."

"Jean Dollent."

"I would be honored, Monsieur Dollent, if you would stay here."

Monsieur Mordaut uncorked a dusty bottle of an unusual shape. Almost without thinking, the Little Doctor drank one of the best wines he had ever tasted.

"You must stay here as long as you please. You must have your meals with us. You shall have the run of the château, and I will answer all your questions to the best of my ability. Excuse me a moment."

He pulled a long woollen cord, and somewhere in the building a reedy bell sounded. Then the old servant who had opened the door to Dollent appeared.

"Ernestine, please lay another place at table. Also prepare the green room for monsieur. He is to be treated

here as if it were his own house, and you must answer any questions he puts to you."

Once more alone with Dollent, he sighed. "You are probably surprised by this reception. But there are, Monsieur Dollent, moments when one jumps at no matter what chance of salvation. If a fortune-teller, a fakir or a dervish offered to help me, I would treat him the same way."

He spoke slowly, in a tired voice, fixing his eyes on the worn carpet while, with exaggerated care, he wiped the lens of the eyeglass which he never used.

"I am a man who has been pursued from birth by ill luck. If there were competitions of bad luck, championships for bad luck, I would be certain to win. I was born to attract unhappiness, not only to myself, but to all those around me.

"My grandparents were extremely rich. My grandfather Mordaut built a large part of the Haussmann area in Paris and was worth millions. The day I was born he hanged himself because of some political scandal in which he was involved. As a result of the shock, my mother developed puerperal fever and died within three days. My father tried to make good his father's losses—but of his whole

fortune only this château remained. I came here when I was five. Playing in the tower I accidentally set fire to a whole wing, which was destroyed, and with it many objects of value."

This was becoming too much. It was almost comical.

"I could continue the list of my misfortunes indefinitely."

"Excuse me," interposed the Little Doctor, "but it seems to me that up to now those misfortunes seem to have fallen more on others than on yourself."

"Ah! Don't you think that it is just that which is the greatest misfortune? Eight years ago my Aunt Duplantet, recently widowed, came to live with us, and six months later she was dead of a heart attack."

"They say that she had been slowly poisoned by arsenic. Hadn't she taken out a life insurance policy in your favor, and didn't you come into a considerable sum of money through her?"

"A hundred thousand francs—scarcely enough to restore the south tower which was crumbling away. Three years later my wife..."

"Died in her turn, and again of a heart attack. She also had taken out a policy which brought you..."

"Which brought me the accusations you know of, and a

sum of two hundred thousand francs."

"Finally," said the Little Doctor, "a fortnight ago, your niece Solange Duplantet, an orphan, died here, at the age of twenty-eight, of a heart attack, leaving you the Duplantet fortune, which is nearly half a million francs."

"But in property and land—not cash," corrected the strange man.

"This time tongues were really loosened, anonymous letters poured into the Préfecture, and an official investigation was set on foot."

"The police have already been three times and found nothing. On two other occasions I was called to Orléans for questioning. I think I would be lynched if I dared appear in the village."

"Because traces of arsenic were found in the three corpses."

"It seems they always find some..."

"You have a son?" asked the Little Doctor rather abruptly.

"Hector, yes. You must have heard of him. As the result of an illness in childhood, the growth of his brain was arrested. He lives here in the castle. At twenty-two he has the body of a man and the intelligence of a child of nine. But still, he's harmless."

"The person who showed me in, Ernestine, has she been here a long time?"

"Always. She was the daughter of my father's gardener. Her parents died and she stayed on."

"She never married?"

"Never."

"And the young woman?"

"Rose," said Monsieur Mordaut with a slight smile, "is Ernestine's niece. For nearly ten years now she has worked here as a maid. When she first came she was a schoolgirl of sixteen."

"Have you any other servants?"

"None. I am not rich enough to live in great style. I live among my books and my works of art. Incidentally, Ernestine hasn't got cancer," said Monsieur Mordaut, "but she talks of nothing else. Since her sister, Rose's mother, died of cancer, she has an unshakable belief that she has also got it. At one moment it's in her back, another in her chest, another in her stomach. She spends half her time consulting doctors, and she's furious that they can't find anything. If she consults you, I advise you . . ."

But a furious Ernestine now appeared before them.

"Well, are you going to have any lunch or not?"

Monsieur Mordaut turned to

the Little Doctor and said:

"Please fear nothing. I will eat from each dish and drink out of each bottle before you touch them. It no longer means anything to me. You should know, Doctor, that I am also suffering with my heart. For the last three months I have felt the same symptoms that my aunt, my wife and my niece all complained of at the beginning of their illnesses."

It really required a very good appetite to eat that meal. The Doctor wondered if he wouldn't have done better to eat and sleep at the inn. Hector ate gluttonously, like a badly brought-up child. It was alarming to watch this large youth with the face of a cunning urchin.

"What do you want to do this afternoon, Doctor?" asked Monsieur Mordaut. "Can I be of any help?"

"I would really like to be free to come and go as I please. I'll look round the grounds. Perhaps I'll ask the servants one or two questions."

And that is where he started. He moved off towards the kitchen where Ernestine was washing the dishes.

"What's he been telling you?" she asked immediately, with the habitual distrust of the peasant. "Did he tell you about my cancer?"

"Yes."

"Ah. He told you it wasn't true, didn't he? But he swears his heart is bad. Well, I'm certain that it's nothing of the sort. He's never had a bad heart. There's nothing wrong with him."

She talked on without stopping her work, and one was conscious of her health and strength. She must once have been a lovely girl, buxom as her niece.

"I wanted to ask you, Doctor. Can cancer be given to people by arsenic or other poisons?"

He didn't want to say yes or no, because it seemed more profitable to play on the old servant's fears.

"What do you feel?" he replied.

"Pains. As if something was being driven into me. Mostly in the bottom of my back, but sometimes also in my stomach."

He mustn't smile. It would make an enemy.

"I'll examine you, if you like."

"As soon as I've finished the washing up," she replied with alacrity.

The examination had lasted a good quarter of an hour, and each time the Little Doctor showed signs of abandoning it,

Ernestine called him firmly to order.

"You haven't taken my blood-pressure."

"What was it last time?"

"Minimum 9, maximum 14 on the Pachot apparatus."

"Well, well!" laughed the Little Doctor. "I see you know your medical terms."

"Indeed I do," she retorted. "You can't buy health, and I want to live to be a hundred and two like my grandmother."

"Have you read any medical books?"

"Gracious, yes. I had some sent from Paris only a month ago."

"I suppose your books mention poisons?"

"Of course, and I won't conceal the fact that I've read every word about them. When there have been three cases under your nose, you learn to look out. Especially when you're in a similar position."

"What did they find when Madame Duplantet died?" she went on. "That she had taken out a life insurance in favor of monsieur. And when his wife died? Another insurance. Well, I'm insured too."

"And the money goes to your niece, I suppose?"

"No. To Monsieur Mordaut. And it's no small matter. A hundred thousand francs!"

"Your master insured your

life for a hundred thousand francs! When was this?"

"At least fifteen years ago. A long time before Madame Duplantet's death, so I thought nothing of it at the time."

It was before Madame Duplantet's death. This fact was immediately catalogued in a corner of the Little Doctor's mind.

"Has your master always lived in such a secluded way? Hasn't he ever had any love affairs?"

"Never."

"Er... your niece Rose is young and pretty. Do you think..."

She looked him straight in the eye before replying. "Rose would never allow it."

She had been dressed for some time, and had again become the stern old cook. She seemed comforted. Her whole expression proclaimed: "Now you know as much as I do. It was my duty to tell you."

It was a strange home. Built to house at least twenty people, with an endless succession of rooms, corridors and unexpected staircases and corners, it now sheltered only four inhabitants. And these four people, instead of living close together as would have been expected—if only to give themselves the illusion of company—seemed to

have used an extraordinary amount of ingenuity in isolating themselves as much as possible. Ernestine's room was on the second floor at the farthest corner of the left wing.

The Little Doctor went in search of Rose.

He had just made a rapid calculation. Rose had been in the house for about a year when Madame Duplantet had died from arsenic—or from a weak heart. Could one conceive of a poisoner sixteen or seventeen years old?

He listened at the door of Rose's room, heard no sound and softly turned the handle.

"Well, come on in," she said impatiently. "I've work to do."

It was obvious that she had expected him to come. She had prepared his reception. The room had been tidied and some papers had been burned in the fireplace.

"Monsieur Mordaut gave me permission to question everyone in the house. Do you mind?"

"Go ahead. I know already what you're going to ask me. My aunt told you I was Monsieur Mordaut's mistress, didn't she? The poor thing thinks of nothing else; that's because she's never been married or had a sweetheart.

The Little Doctor looked at the ashes in the fireplace and

asked more slowly, "Haven't you a lover or a fiancé?"

"Wouldn't that be natural at my age?"

"Can I know his name?"

"If you can find it out... Since you are here to look, look. Now, I must go downstairs, because it's my day to polish the brass. Are you staying here?"

"Yes, I'll stay here if you don't object."

She was annoyed, but she went out and he heard her going down the stairs. She probably didn't know that it is possible to read the writing on burned paper. She hadn't bothered to disperse the ashes, and there was an envelope which, being of thicker paper, had remained almost intact. At one corner the word "restante" could be made out, which led him to suppose that Rose fetched her mail from the village post office. On the other side, the sender had written his address, of which the words "Colonial Infantry Regiment" and, lower down, "Ivory Coast" could be deciphered.

It was almost certain that Rose had a follower, a fiancé or a lover, who was at present stationed with his regiment in the tropics.

"I'm afraid I'm disturbing you once more, Monsieur

Mordaut. You told me this morning that you felt pains from time to time. As a doctor I should like to make sure, above all, that there's no question of slow poisoning."

Without protest and with the trace of a bitter smile the master began to undress.

"For a long time," he sighed, "I have been expecting to suffer the same fate as my wife and aunt. When I saw Solange Duplantet die in her turn..."

The consultation lasted half an hour, and the Little Doctor became more and more serious.

"I wouldn't like to say anything definite, until I had consulted some colleague with more experience. Nevertheless, the discomfort you have been feeling could be caused by arsenical poisoning."

"I told you so." He was neither indignant nor even afraid.

"One more question. Why did you insure Ernestine's life?"

"Did she tell you about it? Well, it's quite simple. One day, an insurance salesman called. He was a clever young man with a persuasive manner. He pointed out that there were several of us in the house and all of us getting on in years..."

"I know exactly the arguments he used. Someone was bound to die first. It would be sad of course, but why

shouldn't it at least help you to restore the castle? If all your family died . . . But, excuse me," the Little Doctor interrupted himself. "Is Hector insured too?"

"The company won't insure mental deficients. Anyhow, I allowed myself to be persuaded, and I insured Ernestine in spite of her wonderful health."

"Another question. Did you insure yourself?"

This idea seemed to strike him for the first time.

"No," he said in a reflective voice.

Should one treat him as an inhuman monster, or just pity him? Or should one read the greatest cunning into everything he said? Why had he so willingly given the Little Doctor a free hand? Wouldn't a man who was capable of poisoning his wife and two other women also be capable of swallowing poison himself, but in insufficient quantities to do any real harm?

The Little Doctor, overcome by a kind of disgust which his curiosity only just succeeded in dominating, wandered round the château and the grounds. He was standing by the gate, wondering if a stroll to the village wouldn't be a good thing—if only for a change of atmosphere—when sounds of confusion reached him, fol-

lowed by a loud cry from Ernestine.

He ran round a corner of the château.

Not far from the kitchen was an old barn containing some straw and milking utensils. Inside this building Hector lay dead, his eyes glassy, his whole face contorted. The Little Doctor did not even have to bend down to diagnose.

"A large dose of arsenic."

Near the corpse, stretched out on the straw, lay a bottle with the inscription "Jamaica Rum."

Monsieur Mordaut turned slowly away, a strange light in his eyes. Ernestine was crying, while Rose, standing a little on one side, kept her head lowered.

Half an hour later, while they were waiting for the police who had been summoned by telephone, the Little Doctor, his brow covered in a cold sweat, was wondering whether he would live to see the end of this investigation.

He had just elucidated, in part at least, the story of the bottle of rum.

"Don't you remember the conversation I had with Monsieur Mordaut after lunch?" asked Ernestine. "You were there. He asked me what there was for dinner and I said 'A

vegetable soup and a cauliflower.'"

She was quite right. The Little Doctor remembered vaguely having heard something of the sort.

"Monsieur Mordaut replied that as you were staying here it wasn't enough, and asked me to make a rum omelette."

"When you need rum," asked Dollent, "where do you get it from?"

"The cupboard in the dining room, where all the spirits are kept."

"Have you a key?"

"No, I ask for it when I want it."

"Did you return the key?"

"Yes, to Monsieur Mordaut."

"What did you do with the rum?"

"Put it on the kitchen mantelpiece, while I cleaned the vegetables."

"Did anyone come into the kitchen? Did you see Hector wandering round?"

"No."

"Did you leave the kitchen?"

"Only for a few minutes to feed the dogs."

"Was Hector in the habit of stealing drinks?"

"It has been known to happen. Not only drinks. He was terribly greedy; he stole anything he could lay his hands

on, and went off, like a puppy, to eat it in a corner."

What would have happened if Hector hadn't found the bottle of arsenic and supposed it to contain rum?

Ernestine would have prepared the omelette. Would anyone have noticed an unusual taste? Wouldn't any bitterness have been put down to the rum? Who would have managed not to eat the omelette—an omelette made in the kitchen, served by Rose, with Monsieur Mordaut, Hector and the Little Doctor in the dining room?

There was no dinner at the château that evening. The police were in possession, and two of them stationed at the gate had difficulty in restraining the crowd, which was becoming noisy.

In the dilapidated drawing-room Monsieur Mordaut, white and haggard, tried to understand the questions which were flung at him by the police. When the door opened after the interview, he was handcuffed. He was led into an adjacent room to remain in custody of two policemen.

How often had Dollent said to himself: A solid fact, even one, and then, if you're not sidetracked, if you don't lose the thread, you must automatically arrive at the truth.

Solid facts. They were:

1. Monsieur Mordaut had placed no obstacle in the way of the Little Doctor's investigation and had insisted on his staying at the château.

2. Ernestine was strong and healthy. She counted on living to be a hundred and two like her grandmother, and everything she did was with this single aim in view; and she was haunted by the idea of cancer.

3. Ernestine said that her niece was not Monsieur Mordaut's mistress.

4. Rose was healthy too, and had a lover or fiancé in the Colonial forces.

5. Rose also said that she was not Monsieur Mordaut's mistress.

6. Monsieur Mordaut showed all the symptoms of the beginnings of slow arsenical poisoning.

7. Like the three dead women, Ernestine had a life insurance which would be paid to her master.

"Would you like to know what I really think?" It was Ernestine's turn to be questioned in the ill-lit drawing room.

"Well, my idea is that my master has gone slightly mad ... and when he knew that he was being found out, he preferred to finish with it all. But, as he was unbalanced and

not like other people, he didn't want any of us to survive him.

"If poor Monsieur Héctor hadn't drunk that rum, we should all be dead by now, including the doctor."

This thought gave Dollent shivers down his spine.

"Monsieur," he murmured to the police superintendent, moving towards the door, "I'd like to have a word with you in private."

They spoke in the corridor, which was as gloomy as everywhere else in the house.

"I suppose—I hope that you have the necessary powers," the Little Doctor concluded. "There is still time ... if you send an officer by car."

His work was over. The mystery was solved, and as usual, it had been in a single flash. Diverse facts, little points of illumination in the fog, and then, suddenly ...

The only way in which the Superintendent and the Little Doctor had managed to escape public curiosity was to take the banquetting chamber on the first floor of the little inn.

After an omelette, made not with rum but with *fines herbes*, they had ordered stewed rabbit, which they were now eating.

"Until we hear from the solicitor, all that I can tell you, Monsieur, is simply hypothesis.

"Well, I was struck by the fact that a man who took out a life insurance for everyone else didn't take one out for himself. If the man is a murderer, and if his object is to get the money from all those policies, what would he do to conceal his intention? First and foremost take out a policy for himself, so as to avert suspicion... Monsieur Mordaut has no life insurance. For some time he has had no family. For some time also he has been suffering from the effects of slow arsenical poisoning, just like the previous victims. So I ask, who will inherit on his death? Which is why I asked you to send an officer to the solicitor.

"Follow me closely now," said the Little Doctor. "It would seem that the person who inherits from Monsieur Mordaut must almost inevitably be the murderer..."

"And the murderer is?"

"A moment. Do you want to know who I think is Monsieur Mordaut's heir? Rose."

"So that..."

"Not so fast. Let me follow my fantasy, if I can use such a word, until your officer returns from the solicitor. I came to the conclusion that at some time, years ago no doubt, Mordaut and Ernestine were lovers. The years went by. He married to restore his fortunes, and Ernestine

time didn't oppose the match.

"She just killed his wife, slowly, as she had killed the aunt whose death brought in so much money. For she was more than Mordaut's mistress, she was his heir. She knew that one day everything he possessed would come to her. I am sure it was she, and not some insurance agent, who was behind that long series of policies. And she had the splendid idea of making him take one out for her, so that she would appear, when the time came, as a potential victim.

"You don't understand all this? It's because you don't live, as I do, in the country, and you are not familiar with long-term schemes. Ernestine intends to live a long time. It hardly matters that she wastes twenty or thirty years with Mordaut. Afterwards she'll be free, and rich. She'll have the house of her dreams and live to be as old as her grandmother.

"That's why she's so frightened of illness. She doesn't want to have worked so hard for nothing. But, the fortune she is eventually to inherit must be big enough. Emilie Duplantet, Madame Mordaut, Solange Duplantet. One by one they die, and their fortunes go to Monsieur Mordaut—and finally to Ernestine.

"What's the risk? No one

will suspect her because nobody thinks she is the beneficiary of all these deaths. No one knows that she made her lover draw up a will leaving everything to her in default of direct heirs. She kills without any danger to herself. If anything happens, he will be the one to go to prison, to be condemned. She only starts worrying the day that she feels that her niece, whom she unwillingly brought into the house, is beginning to exert some influence. For Rose is young and pretty, and Mordaut..."

"It's disgusting," interpolated the Superintendent.

"Alas, it's life. His passion for Ernestine is transferred to her niece. Rose has a lover or a fiancé, but what does it matter to her? Rose has something of her aunt's character. She'll wait a few years. She'll wait for the inheritance her master has promised her. She doesn't have to kill anyone. Did she have any suspicions about these murders? She could ignore them, because, in the end, they fare to her benefit."

"It's been a long business, Messieurs," sighed the police officer who had had no lunch and was now confronted with the remnants of the feast. "Apart from the son," he continued, "all Monsieur Mor-

daut's property is left to Mademoiselle Rose Saupiquet."

The Little Doctor's eyes shone.

"Is there no other will?" asked the Superintendent.

"There was another, in which everything was left to Mademoiselle Ernestine Saupiquet, but it was altered nearly eight years ago."

"Did Mademoiselle Ernestine know?"

"No, the change was made in secret."

The Little Doctor laughed. "So now do you see it all? Ernestine didn't know about the new will. She was certain, one day, of profiting from her crimes, but she wouldn't kill Mordaut until he had amassed enough money."

"And Rose?"

"Legally she's certainly not an accomplice. But still, I wonder if she hadn't guessed what her aunt was up to."

Another bottle was placed on the table, ostensibly for the police officer. But it was the Little Doctor who helped himself first and who, after a gulp, said:

"Do you know what put me on the right track? It was when Ernestine affirmed her niece's virtue, because to doubt that would be to doubt Mordaut's virtue, and if I became suspicious of this, I might begin

to suspect other things.

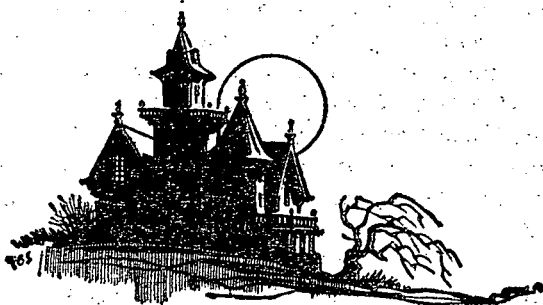
"In fact, we interrupted her in the middle of her work. She only killed Hector by chance in her attempt to get rid of the poison and to incriminate Mordaut. He had ordered the rum omelette for dinner. What better way to throw suspicion on him than to poison the rum? I'm sure that the rum wouldn't in fact have been poured over the omelette—but how easy to say afterwards that it seemed to have a funny smell—and so lead

to the rum-bottle being examined!

"Little more would have remained to be done. And then the pretty home in the country and forty years of life lived according to her dreams."

The Little Doctor replenished his glass and said:

"There are still people, especially in the country, who make their plans far ahead. Which is why they need so desperately to live to a great age."



O. Henry

A Retrieved Reformation

"A Retrieved Reformation" is one of O. Henry's most famous stories—and paradoxically, one of his least known. For the fame of "A Retrieved Reformation" was achieved under an entirely different title. Actually, the plot of the story was not O. Henry's—it was given to him by Jimmy Connors, a fellow prisoner in the Ohio State Penitentiary where O. Henry served three years and three months for the embezzlement of funds from the First National Bank of Austin, Texas. (One of your Editors, during a professorial stay at the University of Texas, in Austin, visited O. Henry's home in that city and was struck by its pathetic similarity to Walt Whitman's house in Camden, New Jersey, and Edgar Allan Poe's homes in Philadelphia and New York.)

But to get back to our main point: "A Retrieved Reformation" became famous as "Alias Jimmy Valentine" (ah, now you recognize it!), first as a successful play, then as a popular song, then as a motion picture, and finally as a radio series. (The reader might be interested to learn that your Editors, as training for their own nine-year radio series, "The Adventures of Ellery Queen," once wrote weekly scripts for "Alias Jimmy Valentine"—anonymously, of course.)

Here then is the original version of "Alias Jimmy Valentine"—the literary acorn from which the mighty oak spread and grew . . .

Criminal: JIMMY VALENTINE

A guard came to the prison shoe shop, where Jimmy Valentine was assiduously stitching uppers, and escorted him to the front office. There the warden handed Jimmy his pardon, which had been signed that morning by the governor. Jimmy took it in a tired kind of way. He had served nearly

ten months of a four-year sentence. He had expected to stay only about three months, at the longest. When a man with as many friends on the outside as Jimmy Valentine had is received in the "stir" it is hardly worth while to cut his hair.

"Now, Valentine," said the warden, "you'll go out in the morning. Brace up, and make a man of yourself. You're not a bad fellow at heart. Stop cracking safes, and live straight."

"Me?" said Jimmy, in surprise. "Why, I never cracked a safe in my life."

"Oh, no," laughed the warden. "Of course not. Let's see, now. How was it you happened to get sent up on that Springfield job? Was it because you wouldn't prove an alibi for fear of compromising somebody in extremely high-toned society? Or was it simply a case of a mean old jury that had it in for you? It's always one or the other with you innocent victims."

"Me?" said Jimmy, still blankly virtuous. "Why, Warden, I never was in Springfield in my life!"

"Take him back, Cronin," smiled the warden, "and fix him up with outgoing clothes. Unlock him at seven in the morning, and let him come to

the bull-pen. Better think over my advice, Valentine."

At a quarter past seven on the next morning Jimmy stood in the warden's outer office. He had on a suit of the villainously fitting, ready-made clothes and a pair of the stiff, squeaky shoes that the state furnishes to its discharged compulsory guests.

The clerk handed him a railroad ticket and the five-dollar bill with which the law expected him to rehabilitate himself into good citizenship and prosperity. The warden gave him a cigar, and shook hands. Valentine, 9762, was chronicled on the books "Par-doned by Governor," and Mr. James Valentine walked out into the sunshine.

Disregarding the song of the birds, the waving green trees, and the smell of the flowers, Jimmy headed straight for a restaurant. There he tasted the first sweet joys of liberty in the shape of a broiled chicken and a bottle of white wine—followed by a cigar a grade better than the one the warden had given him.

From there he proceeded leisurely to the depot. He tossed a quarter into the hat of a blind man sitting by the door, and boarded his train. Three hours set him down in a little town near the state line. He

went to the café of one Mike Dolan and shook hands with Mike, who was alone behind the bar.

"Sorry we couldn't make it sooner, Jimmy, me boy," said Mike. "But we had that protest from Springfield to buck against, and the governor nearly balked. Feeling all right?"

"Fine," said Jimmy. "Got my key?"

He got his key and went upstairs, unlocking the door of a room at the rear. Everything was just as he had left it. There on the floor was still Ben Price's collar button that had been torn from that eminent detective's shirt when they had overpowered Jimmy to arrest him.

Pulling out from the wall a folding bed, Jimmy slid back a panel in the wall, and dragged out a dust-covered suitcase. He opened this and gazed fondly at the finest set of burglar's tools in the East. It was a complete set, made of specially tempered steel, the latest designs in drills, punches, braces and bits, jimmies, clamps, and augers, with two or three novelties invented by Jimmy himself, in which he took pride.

In half an hour Jimmy went downstairs and through the café. He was now dressed in tasteful and well-fitting clothes, and carried his dusted and

cleaned suitcase in his hand.

"Got anything on?" asked Mike Dolan, genially.

"Me?" said Jimmy, in a puzzled tone. "I don't understand. I'm representing the New York Amalgamated Short Snap Biscuit Cracker and Frazzled Wheat Company."

This statement delighted Mike to such an extent that Jimmy had to take a seltzer-and-milk on the spot. He never touched "hard" drinks.

A week after the release of Valentine, 9762, there was a neat job of safe burglary done in Richmond, Indiana, with no clue to the author. A scant \$800 was all that was secured.

Two weeks after that a patented, improved, burglar-proof safe in Logansport was opened like a cheese to the tune of \$1500.

That began to interest the rogue-catchers. Then an old-fashioned bank-safe in Jefferson City became active and threw out of its crater an eruption of banknotes amounting to \$5000.

The losses were now high enough to bring the matter up into Ben Price's class of work. By comparing notes, a remarkable similarity in the methods of the burglaries was noticed. Ben Price investigated the scenes of the robberies, and was heard to remark: "That's Dandy Jim Valentine's auto-

graph. He's resumed business. Look at that combination knob—jerked out as easy as pulling up a radish in wet weather. He's got the only clamps that can do it. And look how clean those tumblers were punched out! Jimmy never has to drill but one hole. Yes, I guess I want Mr. Valentine. He'll do his bit next time without any short-time or clemency foolishness."

Ben Price knew Jimmy's habits. He had learned them while working up the Springfield case. Long jumps, quick getaways, no confederates, and a taste for good society—these ways had helped Mr. Valentine to become noted as a successful dodger of retribution. It was given out that Ben Price had taken up the trail of the elusive cracksman, and other people with burglar-proof safes felt more at ease.

One afternoon Jimmy Valentine and his suitcase climbed out of the mailhack in Elmore, a little town five miles off the railroad down in the black-jack country of Arkansas. Jimmy, looking like an athletic young senior just home from college, went down the broad sidewalk toward the hotel.

A young lady crossed the street, passed him at the corner, and entered a door over which was the sign "The Elmore

Bank." Jimmy Valentine looked into her eyes, forgot what he was, and became another man. She lowered her eyes and colored slightly. Young men of Jimmy's syle and looks were scarce in Elmore.

Jimmy collared a boy loafing on the steps of the bank as if he were one of the stockholders and began to ask him questions about the town, feeding him dimes at intervals. By and by the young lady came out, looking royally unconscious of the young man with the suitcase, and went her way.

"Isn't that young lady Miss Polly Simpson?" asked Jimmy, with specious guile.

"Naw," said the boy. "She's Annabel Adams. Her pa owns this bank. What'd you come to Elmore for? Is that a gold watch-chain? I'm going to get a bulldog. Got any more dimes?"

Jimmy went to the Planters' Hotel, registered as Ralph D. Spencer, and engaged a room. He leaned on the desk and declared his platform to the clerk. He said he had come to Elmore to look for a location to go into business. How was the shoe business, now, in the town? He had thought of the shoe business. Was there an opening?

The clerk was impressed by the clothes and manner of Jimmy. He, himself, was some-

thing of a pattern of fashion to the thinly gilded youth of Elmore, but he now perceived his shortcomings. While trying to figure out Jimmy's manner of tying his four-in-hand he cordially gave information.

Yes, there ought to be a good opening in the shoe line. There wasn't an exclusive shoe store in the place. The dry goods and general stores handled them. Business in all lines was fairly good. Hoped Mr. Spencer would decide to locate in Elmore. He would find it a pleasant town to live in, and the people very sociable.

Mr. Spencer thought he would stop over in the town a few days and look over the situation. No, the clerk needn't call the boy. He would carry up his suitcase himself; it was rather heavy.

Mr. Ralph Spencer, the phoenix that arose from Jimmy Valentine's ashes—ashes left by the flame of a sudden and alterative attack of love—remained in Elmore, and prospered. He opened a shoe store and secured a good run of trade.

Socially he was also a success, and made many friends. And he accomplished the wish of his heart. He met Miss Annabel Adams and became more and more captivated by her charms.

At the end of a year the situation of Mr. Ralph Spencer was this: he had won the respect of the community, his shoe store was flourishing, and he and Annabel were engaged to be married in two weeks. Mr. Adams, the typical, plodding, country banker, approved of Spencer. Annabel's pride in him almost equalled her affection. He was as much at home in the family of Mr. Adams and that of Annabel's married sister as if he were already a member.

One day Jimmy sat down in his room and wrote this letter, which he mailed to the address of one of his old friends in St. Louis:

Dear Old Pal:

I want you to be at Sullivan's place, in Little Rock, next Wednesday night, at nine o'clock. I want you to wind up some little matters for me. And, also, I want to make you a present of my kit of tools. I know you'll be glad to get them—you couldn't duplicate the lot for a thousand dollars. Say, Billy, I've quit the old business—a year ago. I've got a nice store. I'm making an honest living, and I'm going to marry the finest girl on earth two weeks from now. It's the only life, Billy—the straight one. I wouldn't touch a dollar of another man's money now

for a million. After I get married I'm going to sell out and go West, where there won't be so much danger of having old scores brought up against me. I tell you, Billy, she's an angel. She believes in me; and I wouldn't do another crooked thing for the whole world. Be sure to be at Sully's, for I must see you.

Your old friend,
JIMMY

On the Monday night after Jimmy wrote this letter, Ben Price jogged unobtrusively into Elmore in a livery buggy. He lounged about town in his quiet way until he found out what he wanted to know. From the drug store across the street from Spencer's shoe store he got a good look at Ralph D. Spencer.

Going to marry the banker's daughter, are you, Jimmy? said Ben to himself, softly. Well, I don't know!

The next morning Jimmy took breakfast at the Adamses. He was going to Little Rock that day to order his wedding suit and buy something nice for Annabel. That would be the first time he had left town since he came to Elmore. It had been more than a year now since those last professional "jobs," and he thought he could safely venture out.

After breakfast quite a

family party went downtown together—Mr. Adams, Annabel, Jimmy, and Annabel's married sister with her two little girls, aged five and nine. They came by the hotel where Jimmy still boarded, and he ran up to his room and brought down his suitcase. Then they went on to the bank. There stood Jimmy's horse and buggy and Dolph Gibson, who was going to drive him over to the railroad station.

All went inside the high, carved-oak railings into the banking room—Jimmy included, for Mr. Adams's future son-in-law was welcome anywhere. The clerks were pleased to be greeted by the good-looking, agreeable young man who was going to marry Miss Annabel.

Jimmy set his suitcase down. Annabel, whose heart was bubbling with happiness and lively youth, put on Jimmy's hat and picked up the suitcase. "Wouldn't I make a nice drummer?" said Annabel. "My, Ralph, how heavy it is. Feels like it was full of gold bricks."

"Lot of nickel-plated shoe-horns in there," said Jimmy coolly, "that I'm going to return. Thought I'd save express charges by taking them up. I'm getting economical."

The Elmore Bank had just put in a new safe and vault. Mr. Adams was very proud of it,

and insisted on an inspection by everyone. The vault was a small one, but it had a new patented door. It fastened with three solid steel bolts thrown simultaneously with a single handle, and had a time lock.

Mr. Adams beamingly explained its workings to Mr. Spencer, who showed a courteous but not too intelligent interest. The two children, May and Agatha, were delighted by the shining metal and funny clock and knobs.

While they were thus engaged, Ben Price sauntered in and leaned on his elbow, looking casually inside between the railings. He told the teller that he didn't want anything; he was just waiting for a man he knew.

Suddenly there were screams from the women, and a commotion. Unperceived by the elders, May, the nine-year-old girl, in a spirit of play, had shut Agatha in the vault. She had then shot the bolts and turned the knob of the combination as she had seen Mr. Adams do.

The old banker sprang to the handle and tugged at it.

"The door can't be opened," he groaned. "The clock hasn't been wound nor the combination set."

Agatha's mother screamed again, hysterically.

"Hush!" said Mr. Adams, raising his trembling hand. "All be quiet for a moment. Agatha!" he called as loudly as he could. "Listen to me." During the following silence they could just hear the faint sound of the child wildly shrieking in the dark vault in a panic of terror.

"My precious darling!" wailed the mother. "She will die of fright! Open the door! Oh, break it open! Can't you men do something?"

"There isn't a man nearer than Little Rock who can open that door," said Mr. Adams, in a shaky voice. "My God! Spencer, what shall we do? That child—she can't stand it long in there. There isn't enough air, and, besides, she'll go into convulsions from fright."

Agatha's mother, frantic now, beat the door of the vault with her hands. Somebody wildly suggested dynamite. Annabel turned to Jimmy, her large eyes full of anguish, but not yet despairing. To a woman nothing seems quite impossible to the powers of the man she worships.

"Can't you do something, Ralph—try, won't you?"

He looked at her with a queer, soft smile in his keen eyes.

"Annabel," he said, "give me

that rose you are wearing, will you?"

Hardly believing that she heard him aright, she unpinned the bud from the bosom of her dress and placed it in his hand. Jimmy stuffed it into his vest pocket, threw off his coat, and pulled up his shirt sleeves. With that act Ralph D. Spencer passed away and Jimmy Valentine took his place.

"Get way from the door, all of you," he commanded.

He set his suitcase on the table and opened it out flat. From that time on he seemed to be unconscious of the presence of anyone else. He laid out the shining, queer implements swiftly and orderly, whistling softly to himself as he always did when at work. In a deep silence and immovable, the others watched him as if under a spell.

In a minute Jimmy's pet drill was biting smoothly into the steel door. In ten minutes—

breaking his own burglarious record—he threw back the bolts and opened the door.

Agatha, almost collapsed, but safe, was gathered into her mother's arms.

Jimmy Valentine put on his coat, and walked outside the railings toward the front door. As he went he thought he heard a faraway voice that he once knew call "Ralph!" But he never hesitated.

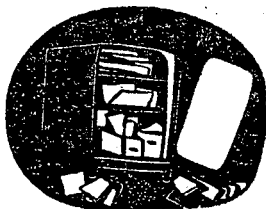
At the door a big man stood somewhat in his way.

"Hello, Ben!" said Jimmy, still with his strange smile. "Got around at last, have you? Well, let's go. I don't know that it makes much difference, now."

Then Ben Price acted strangely.

"Guess you're mistaken, Mr. Spencer," he said. "Don't believe I recognize you. Your buggy's waiting for you, ain't it?"

And Ben Price turned and strolled down the street.



Ellery Queen

Child Missing!

Billy Harper's mother and father were on the verge of a divorce—and then seven-year-old Billy was kidnaped near the park...

The Billy Harper kidnaping case—in Sergeant Thomas Velie's quaint linguistic goulash—took the cake for kicking the form sheet in the brisket. For one thing—and there were others—the F.B.I. came into it at no time whatsoever. Inspector Queen explained the abstention of the Federal Bureau by saying that he could hardly bother J. Edgar's Ph.D.s with a crime problem that never amounted to more than child's play.

But the Inspector said that only after Ellery had solved the case. At the time it did not seem a simple business at all.

Billy Harper was seven years old—a bright but unfortunate child, everyone agreed. When you were seven, it was an unhappy experience to be taken away from your father's big house beside the park and to be installed in a little box of a hotel apartment across town with your swollen-nosed moth-

er and a nurse who was pretty but hardly a substitute for your father.

Billy had heard bitter words like "divorce" and "No-I-won't-give-up-ten-years-of-my-life-quite-that-easily-Lloyd-Harper!" Also, some mysterious creature named "Jarryl Jones" had been booted about in the parental war which Billy had illegally heard raging from above stairs that dreadful night. (This Jarryl Jones was a "model," it seemed, which made no sense at all, since models were airplanes and ships and things.) An unknown word, "infatuation," came into it several times, and a vaguely frightening one called "custody" which got both his parents very angry indeed. And finally Billy's mother said something icy-sharp about "a six months' trial separation," whatever that was, "after which, if you still think you want to marry this girl, Lloyd,

"I'll give you your divorce." And then his mother and Miss M'Govern had taken Billy away to the little box on the other side of the park, leaving his father behind. When Miss M'Govern took Billy to visit his father, which she did every Friday afternoon thereafter, the greatest man in the world was so tightly gentle it scared Billy, because that wasn't his father at all—in the old days he had bellowed and roughhoused wonderfully. It was like visiting a stranger. And as Billy roamed disconsolately over his old house from cellar to attic on those Friday afternoons, the house was a stranger too. Whatever it meant, it was devastating.

And then Billy Harper was kidnapped.

He was snatched at a few minutes past 6 P.M. after the fifth consecutive Friday visit to his father's house. Miss M'Govern sobbed that she had turned her back on Billy for no more than a *second*—to post a letter at the West Side exit from the park on their way back from Mr. Harper's—but when she looked around Billy had disappeared.

At first Miss M'Govern had been annoyed, thinking he had darted back into the park against her strict injunction. But when she could not find

him she became alarmed and sought a policeman. The policeman had no better luck. Calls from the park station to Mrs. Harper's apartment and Lloyd Harper's house brought Billy's parents on the run; each said that Billy had not come "home," and they quarreled over the sad ambiguous word while the desk sergeant tried patiently to get it all straight. With night coming on the entire park patrol was alerted for "a lost boy seven years of age"; by 3 A.M., when the last negative report was in, it dawned on everyone that Billy's disappearance might have a grimmer explanation and a general alarm went out.

Lloyd Harper was a wealthy man; the Harpers had been mentioned slyly in several recent newspaper columns; one columnist had stacked his story by referring to young Billy's Friday afternoon "commutation trips across the park."

It began to add up.

Inspector Queen of Headquarters entered the case at 8 o'clock the following morning. At 9:06 A.M. the postman on his regular rounds delivered Lloyd Harper's mail; at 9:12 A.M. Inspector Queen made a certain surreptitious telephone call; at 9:38 A.M. Ellery rang the Harper bell and was admitted by none other than

Sergeant Velie of the Inspector's staff.

"This," the Sergeant announced to Ellery forbiddingly, "is one for the nanny goats."

Ellery found his father in the drawing room making like a spectator. The little Inspector came to him at once.

"The F.B.I.? No, not yet, son," said the Inspector in an affable *sotto voce*. "It's kind of a funny case . . . Yes, there's been a ransom note, but wait till Piggott's through with that nurse . . . Who? Oh, the babe who's sitting there doing a burn. That's Jarryl Jones, the other woman. Harper had a date with her last night which of course he couldn't keep, and she stormed over first thing this morning to give him what-for and walked into this. Bet she's sorry, heh-heh! Shhh." Jarryl Jones was beautiful and Mibs Harper—at least this morning—was definitely not; nevertheless, Lloyd Harper stood over his wife's chair, stubble-cheeked and hollow-eyed, with his back to his great love.

Miss M'Govern spoke breathily. No, she had nothing to hide. The letter which she had turned her back on little Billy Harper to post the day before? It had been addressed to her boy friend. Mr. Harper will tell you. Ralph Kleinschmidt is his name. Ralph Kleinschmidt had

been the Harpers' chauffeur . . . yes, he was sort of a hot-head . . .

"I fired him two weeks ago for drunkenness," said Lloyd Harper shortly. "With no references. He got pretty nasty."

"Lloyd! Do you really think—?"

"So he's getting even," said Velie sadly. "Now you don't want to get mixed up in this, girlie, so what's the address you wrote on your letter to this guy?"

"General Delivery, Main Post Office," whispered Miss M'Govern. "We've corresponded that way before when one of us was on the wing looking for a job—"

"Where's Kleinschmidt's hideout?" barked Detective Piggott.

"I don't know! Won't you believe me? Anyway, Ralph wouldn't—"

At Inspector Queen's unexcited nod, Piggott took her down to headquarters.

"We're wasting valuable time," snarled Lloyd Harper.

"I want my baby," moaned Mibs Harper.

"That ransom note, Inspector—!"

"Yes, the ransom note," said Inspector Queen, producing an envelope. "Ellery, what do you make of this?"

The envelope was squarish and large, of heavy cream-colored crushed bond. Obviously expensive. Lloyd Harper's address was blocklettered in smeary pencil in a style so crude as almost to defy deciphering. The envelope had passed through the local substation the night before—from the postmark, about two hours after Billy Harper's abduction.

The single sheet of notepaper inside was made to fit a much smaller envelope. It was tinted mauve, a fine deckle-edged rag paper.

The same smeary, crude block-printing said, without salutation: *The price is 50 grand to get the kid back safe. Small bills in oilcloth bundle. Father to drive alone by southwest corner La Brea and Wilshire Boulevards, exactly 11:15 a.m. today, throw bundle to sidewalk, keep going. Follow orders or else.* There was no signature.

"Mailed last night, couldn't possibly be delivered before this morning's mail," said Inspector Queen, "which was a few minutes past nine..."

"I take it what you have in mind," murmured Ellery, "is that the southwest corner of La Brea and Wilshire Boulevards being located in only one city in the world—Los Angeles, California—and the time for

deposit of the ransom money on said corner being set for 11:15 this morning, the whole thing's impossible."

"Which the kidnaper of course knows," said the Inspector. "It'll be a long time before you can go from Manhattan to Los Angeles in two hours. So you agree, Ellery, this note is a phony?"

"I agree," said Ellery, frowning at the note, "that something is awfully wrong..."

"I want action!" shouted Billy's father.

"You, Mr. Harper, want a kick in the pants," said Inspector Queen unexpectedly. "I've been sniffing your premises." He took from his pocket a handful of large, squarish white envelopes. "Identical with the envelope the note came in. Your envelope, Mr. Harper. You didn't snatch your own boy to get him away from his ma, now, did you? And use the note as a red herring?"

Billy's father sank into a chair. "Mibs, I swear to you—"

"Where's Billy?" screamed his wife. "What did you do with my child, you—you baby-snatcher!"

"Oh, come off it, Mrs. H.," said a voice, and they all looked around to see the beautiful Miss Jones uncrossing her famous legs and rising to her much

photographed height. "Take a look at that notepaper, Inspector. It's hers."

"Mrs. Harper's?" asked Ellery, elevating his brows.

"That's right. She wrote me a threatening letter on paper just like it only last week." Jarryl Jones laughed. "She's stashed the kid somewhere and sent the note, using one of Lloyd's envelopes to frame him for the foul deed. A woman scorned, et cetera . . . Darlin', you owe me a meal from last night. How about brunch?"

But Lloyd Harper was staring at his wife.

She said slowly, "Of course it isn't true. I wouldn't do a thing like that, Lloyd. And if I did, I wouldn't be so stupid as to use my own notepaper."

"Or me to use my own envelopes, Mibs," groaned Harper. "Anybody could have got hold of one of my envelopes, Inspector Queen—or for that matter of a sheet of my wife's stationery. Somebody's framing me—her—us!"

The Inspector patted his mustache agitatedly. Then he muttered, "Time," and took Ellery aside. "Son . . ."

"Let's wait," Ellery soothed him. "Till the Sergeant gets back."

"Velie? Where'd he go, Ellery?"

"I sent him over to our read you the original ransom

apartment to get something out of my newspaper file. I want to check my memory."

"Of what?"

"Of a feature story I read a couple of Sundays ago, Dad. If I'm right, it's going to clear this thing up."

Sergeant Velie reappeared twenty minutes later, just after Inspector Queen received two reports—one that the nurse, Miss M'Govern, had not yet revealed the whereabouts of Ralph Kleinschmidt, the other that the all-night city-wide search for little Billy Harper had failed to turn up a trace of him. Mrs. Harper was weeping again, the beautiful Miss Jones was telling Mr. Harper off, and Mr. Harper was glaring at the beautiful Miss Jones with homicide in his bloodshot eyes.

"Thank you, Sergeant!" Ellery snatched the gaudy Sunday supplement and turned to the center spread. "Ah . . . See this?" He flourished the newspaper. "It's the story of a kidnaping in California a year or so ago. The child was recovered when the F.B.I. caught the kidnaper, and the man was tried under the Lindbergh law and found guilty. He was executed a few weeks ago, which is why the story was rehashed in this Sunday feature. Now let me

note sent by the California kidnaper to the father of the kidnaped California child." And Ellery read, "*The price is 50 grand to get the kid back safe. Small bills in oilcloth bundle. Father to drive alone by southwest corner La Brea and Wilshire Boulevards, exactly 11:15 a.m. today...*"

"The same note," gasped Inspector Queen.

"Identical, Dad. Right down to the *Follow orders or else*. And that tells us," said Ellery, whirling, "who's behind the snatch of Billy Harper."

And everyone was as still as Billy's space helmet on his father's bust of George Washington.

"The kidnaper of Billy Harper," Ellery went on, waving the supplement, "not only used the ransom note in the year-old California case as the model for his ransom note, he even duplicated the Los Angeles street corner indicated in the California note as the place for the payment of the Harper money. That is, the kidnaper appointed an *impossible* meeting place! Why should he have done this? If the kidnaping of Billy were a blind—if, let us say, Mr. Harper wanted to take possession of his little boy and make it seem to everyone, especially his wife, like an outside abduction for

the usual ransom—he would hardly have designated an impossible place for the 'payment' of the ransom, making the whole business suspect at once, when all he had to do was name a rendezvous in the New York area and simply fail to have his mythical 'kidnaper' show up. The criminal would be thought to have changed his mind or been scared off.

"So the designation of Los Angeles as the payoff place in the Harper case makes utterly no sense—that is," said Ellery softly, "if you think of the kidnaper as someone with the capacity to realize how impossible it is. But suppose the writer of the Harper note *didn't* realize that New York and Los Angeles are three thousand miles apart?"

"Why, Maestro," said Sergeant Velie, "a moron knows that."

"An adult moron, perhaps, Sergeant," said Ellery with a smile. "But even a bright little boy of seven may be excused for his ignorance. Mr. and Mrs. Harper, I'm happy to say that your son Billy was kidnaped by none other than—*himself*! this Sunday supplement story probably gave him the idea, and in his enthusiasm he copied the California ransom note word for word. He used a sheet of your notepaper, Mrs. Harper,

and one of your envelopes, Mr. Harper, not realizing that in doing so he was implicating both his mommy and his daddy....Where is he?" Ellery grinned in answer to Billy Harper's father's rather grim question. "Well, my hunch is—based on this and that—that Billy went back across the park last evening, after giving Miss M'Govern the slip, and sneaked into this very house, Mr. Harper..."

They found young Billy holed up behind an old trunk in the attic surrounded by the crusts of six cream cheese and

jelly sandwiches, two empty milk bottles, and thirteen comic books. Definitely awed, Sergeant Velie counted them. Billy said he had snatched himself 'cause it seemed like an excitin' thing to do. But Ellery has always held the young man to be a psychological prodigy who knew just what to do to make two rather difficult adults patch up his personal world again. There is no way of proving this, but it is significant that Miss Jarryl Jones was seen with Lloyd Harper no more and Mrs. Harper moved right back across the park.



Hugh Pentecost

Jericho and the Silent Witnesses

If this short novel had been written fifteen years ago, the basic plot situation would have seemed incredible. No reader a decade and a half ago would have believed that a young woman could be murdered in cold blood on a big-city street, with dozens of people watching the brutal crime and not one of them caring enough to lift a finger to prevent the murder, or even to lift a finger to call the police for help. Yet situations exactly like this have actually occurred in recent years, and are still occurring as of the time of this writing.

Hugh Pentecost has more on his mind than public apathy to cruelty and crime. Read this short novel—and listen to him. Take his words to heart. His story goes beyond even what it has to say in terms of plot. It deals with the real nature of compassion. For true compassion is more than mere feeling: true compassion is feeling and doing . . .

Detective: JOHN JERICHO

A woman's scream, heard at two o'clock in the morning, will produce different results in different localities. In the plush areas of Park and Fifth Avenues, or in their expensive side streets, the scream would probably be ignored on the grounds that "it's none of my business." In the Times Square subway station, or in Hell's Kitchen or the waterfront areas, the scream could be a signal of violence to

be avoided at the risk of one's own life and limbs.

In Jefferson Mews, in the heart of Greenwich Village, a woman's scream could be a part of Saturday night's music. Jefferson Mews had once been a group of stables built around an open court, where the rich kept their horses and elegant rigs. Eventually, with the arrival of the automobile and the passing of the horse car, the stables had been converted into apartments

and studios, occupied by artists, writers, poets, and a collection of white-collar workers who found the surroundings "quaint." Greenwich Village today is no longer the home of great revolutionary talents in the arts. Beatniks and offbeat musicians hover there now, but real estate tycoons are gradually closing in. Modern apartment houses rise month by month above the remnants of old private houses.

Jefferson Mews remains intact, still housing writers and poets, artists and musicians, some really talented people and some outrageous fakes. A scream in the middle of the night in Jefferson Mews can have many innocent meanings—a wild party which will go on all week-end, a brawl between hopped-up women fighting over some cherished male. It could mean that Mike Guffanti was beating his wife again. Mike Guffanti, a former dockhand on the nearby waterfront, was the landlord's handyman in Jefferson Mews. People would smile if they heard Bertha Guffanti screaming. They knew that Bertha Guffanti liked to be beaten—it was proof of Mike's manliness and her own attractiveness. She always sounded terrified, but actually her screams were a kind of savage love call.

But on the particular Saturday night—rather, Sunday morning—of this particular scream the Guffantis were already entwined in the miracle of a married love affair. They said later that they didn't even hear it.

But others heard it.

In one of the artist's studios in the Mews a man stood scowling at a blank canvas. Fluorescent lights turned the high-ceilinged room with its northern skylight into day. The artist was a huge man, six feet four, with massive shoulders and the tapering waist of a ballet dancer. He had fiery red hair and a red beard that jutted belligerently at the empty canvas. He was mixing paints on a palette with hamlike hands that moved with a concert pianist's dexterity. He heard the scream and it seemed to make him angry: it was an intrusion on his concentration.

Behind him, standing near the door of the studio, was a girl. She had high cheekbones, a pale white face, a bright scarlet mouth, hair that glittered in the artificial light like a blackbird's wing. Her dress was simple, with a deep V in front. She carried a small cheap-looking bag. She looked at a row of canvases stacked along the wall, brilliant in color, almost violent in their reflection of the

artist's energy. The signature, in bold black letters, was clearly visible across the room.

Jericho.

The girl heard the scream too, and a nerve twitched high up on her ivory cheek.

"Where do I take off my clothes?" she asked.

"You don't," John Jericho said, scowling at his paints.

"I've never taken my clothes off to be painted," the girl said, "but I wouldn't mind doing it for you."

"I'd be flattered," Jericho said, without turning his head, "if I didn't know that in your profession taking off your clothes is an occupational technique."

"You don't have to talk dirty," the girl said. "You asked me to pose. I understood artists always wanted girls to pose in the nude. I am willing."

"And always at two o'clock in the morning?" Jericho turned and gave her a cheerful grin.

"I don't know much about artists," the girl said.

"Lucky you," Jericho said. "By the way, what's your name?"

"Lucinda Laverne," the girl said.

"The hell it is!" Jericho's laugh was like distant thunder.

"You're right," the girl said. "It's really Mabel Chernovsky."

When I went into show business I took the name of Lucinda Laverne. It seemed easier to remember."

"But you're not in show business any more."

The girl lowered her dark eyes. "No."

Jericho put down his palette and brushes on a square wooden table beside the easel. "Let me take the mystery out of this—Mabel," he said. "I saw you standing on the street corner outside the Mews. I've been looking at this blank canvas all day and all night. You were suddenly the answer to a problem. Since I took it you were standing there waiting for business to come along I thought you might be willing to involve yourself in my business. As I told you, I'm willing to pay your usual fee for the time involved. I'm not interested in your beautiful white body. I just want you to stand over there on that platform, looking exactly the way you did when I saw you on the street corner, before you knew I was looking at you. I want to get that expression down in paint if I can. Do you know what you were thinking about just before you saw me?"

"I wish you'd call me Lucinda," the girl said. "It would sound nicer than Mabel—coming from you."

"It's a deal," Jericho said. "Now, what were you thinking about, Lucinda?"

"What a stinking world we live in," Lucinda said.

"But you were facing up to it," Jericho said, his eyes bright.

"What else is there to do?" Lucinda said, with a faint shrug of her shapely shoulders.

"It takes courage," Jericho said.

Out in the Mews the woman screamed again, this time with a piercing note of terror.

"I wish those jerks would do their brawling somewhere else," Jericho said impatiently.

Lucinda stood very still, listening. Her face had turned a shade paler.

"If I tell you what I'm after," Jericho said, "I may spoil it. But I think I must. You've heard all the talk about 'the war against poverty'?"

"Politics," the girl said, with unexpected bitterness.

"Right," Jericho said. He took a black, curved-stem pipe from the pocket of his corduroy jacket and began to fill it with a stringy black tobacco from an oilskin pouch. "The rich, the influential, the hopeful vote seekers—they all talk about it. But the poverty is here—all around us here in Jefferson Mews. I know. I've been painting in this studio for two months."

"You don't look as though this was the best you could afford," Lucinda said.

"I've been looking for a kind of truth," Jericho went on. "How can hundreds of thousands of people be persuaded that the 'war against poverty' is worth fighting? I'm supposed to do a mural for a special exhibit at the World's Fair. I've thought of it a thousand ways—the filth, the rats, the overcrowding, the degradation, the crushed human dignity. If people could see that, I kept telling myself, it would 'sell' the fight. Then, tonight, I saw you."

Lucinda looked at him, puzzled.

"You see, Lucinda, in theory I'm willing to fight rats. I'm willing to contribute to mops and brooms and carbolic acid; I'm willing to buy plants for flower boxes to make things look more cheerful. But I don't feel any passionate drive about it. What would make me fight with all my guts to do something real about this poverty? That's the answer I didn't find until tonight—when I saw you."

"I don't see what I—"

"Human courage in the face of it all!" Jericho said, his voice loud. "You stood there, your head up, your eyes clear, facing up to it."

"I'm just a prostitute," the

girl said, her voice a whisper.

"I know, Lucinda. It takes courage to face the fact that you've been driven to that. I saw you, and I said to myself, 'If people could see that courage in the face of a thousand horrors they'd be much more likely to enlist in the fight than they would if they saw a realistic painting of a hungry rat eating from a garbage pail.'"

Out in the Mews the woman screamed for the third time. Now there were understandable words, wrenched out of an intolerable agony. "Please, please, please—*help!* In the name of God—*help!*"

Angrily Jericho walked over to the window. He leaned out to shout, to demand that the woman be silent.

Instead he froze.

Down below, at the end of the Mews, he saw her. She was down on her knees, bent backward so that her shoulders were against the sooty walls of a brick building. Standing over her was the shadowy figure of a man.

It was like walking into a darkened theater and seeing a play already on. Unbelievably there were other actors besides the woman and the man. There were people at windows, watching. Like Jericho.

The man's hand rose, and for

a brief moment the blade of a knife glittered in the light of a street lamp some distance away. Then the knife came down, aimed at the woman's breast or stomach. Up and violently down again. Up and down. There was one final, wavering scream.

The people in the windows remained motionless. All but Jericho. He turned, and like a charging bull, swept out of the studio, clattering down a flight of stairs to the street level.

Behind him the girl Lucinda, who had seen nothing, turned and leaned against the wall. Her body shook with uncontrolled sobbing.

Jericho raced across the cobblestones of the Mews toward the dark corner. "Stop it!" he shouted at the top of his giant voice. "*Stop it!*"

Dozens of motionless people in the upper windows watched the red-bearded artist disappear into the shadows.

The man was gone. The woman had toppled over. One side of her face lay in a little puddle of stagnant water. Moments ago it had been a lovely face. A girl's face. She couldn't have been much over twenty.

There was a quantity of blood. You could smell it.

Jericho, his eyes becoming accustomed to the gloom,

glanced quickly around him. No man. No sound of running footsteps. In the time it had taken Jericho to race down from his studio the man had vanished.

Jericho knelt beside the girl and lifted her face out of the dirty water. Her eyes were open, but they saw nothing. Jericho felt hot blood on his hands. He saw that she must have been stabbed at least twenty times. From the time of the first scream until now must have been an eternity for her.

Jericho's massive body shook with anger. If only he had gone to the window at the first scream—

He looked up and he saw them—faces blank with a kind of horror.

"I don't suppose any of you bothered to call the cops!" he shouted.

Faces withdrew, but no one answered.

From outside the Mews came the sounds of thinned-out traffic—the guttural roar of a night truck, the shrill whistle of the doorman outside a night club, the answering toot of a taxi horn, the vague medley of music from a dozen sources, including windows in the Mews.

Jericho, crouching on the cobblestones with the bloody body of the girl still cradled in

his arms, glanced around at the now empty windows, and he was torn by a kind of fury.

"Somebody! Get down here!" he shouted. It could have been heard in the next block.

Then he heard someone and turned his head. It was the girl, Lucinda. She came up and stood beside him, her eyes round with disbelief, the back of her right hand pressed against her mouth.

"Stay with her while I get the cops," Jericho said. "She was murdered, and the killer can't be far away."

"No!" Lucinda said sharply. Then, "I called the police on your phone."

"Good girl," Jericho said, controlling his anger. "There were dozens of people watching—doing nothing! I never saw anything like it."

"If we'd looked when we first heard her—"

"Yeah. Couple of drunks, I thought."

From outside the Mews came the sound of a police car siren.

Something in the girl's face made Jericho ask if she knew the woman.

Lucinda nodded slowly. "Mary Brady," she said. "Night club singer."

"She lives here in the Mews?"

"Yes."

People began to drift out of doorways, moving hesitantly toward the tragic tableau.

"They come *now!*" Jericho said, his voice harsh.

A police car swept in through the far entrance to the Mews. Two cops with drawn guns jumped out of the sharply braked car.

"Put her down," one of them said, pointing his gun steadily at Jericho's red-bearded face.

Jericho's teeth bared in a white, angry smile. "Better late than never," he said.

"Put her down."

"Get something to cover her with," Jericho said, not moving.

"What happened here?" the second cop asked.

The people moved in closer. Their faces looked like frozen masks. A shrill woman's voice broke the silence. "She was stabbed three times!"

The second cop was kneeling beside Jericho. "More like three dozen times," he said. "My God, it's Mary Brady!"

"He stabbed her," the woman said, "and then he went away and came back and stabbed her again. He went away a second time and came back and finished the job."

"I'm giving you ten seconds to put her down!" the first cop said to Jericho.

"Not him," the shrill woman said. "He came to help but he was too late. The other man ran away."

"You're the woman who turned in the alarm?" the second cop asked.

"Not me," the woman said.

"Dozens of them saw it," Jericho said, "but none of them turned in an alarm. My friend here, Miss Laverne, called you."

"You saw it?" the first cop asked Lucinda.

Lucinda shook her head. "Only when it was over—when Mr. Jericho ran out to help."

"You're Jericho?" the first cop asked.

"I'm Jericho."

"You with this Laverne dame when it happened?"

"Yes."

"She solicit you?" the cop asked.

"Listen, stupid," Jericho said, "this is a murder. You've got dozens of witnesses here. Stop worrying about other things. Do something about *this!*"

"Don't talk to me like that," the cop said.

A second woman pressed forward—a girl in a bright red housecoat. She had a patchwork quilt in her arms. "You can cover her with this," she said.

Jericho took the quilt and wrapped it gently around Mary

Brady's body. Then he put her down on the cobblestones. He stood up, facing the cop, towering over him.

"I say it again," Jericho said. "You're stupid. While you stand here gabbling about 'soliciting,' the guy who did this is getting farther and farther away. Get a description of him and put out an alarm."

The cop's face was white but he lowered his gun, then slid it back in its holster. "You saw him?"

"He was a shadow in the dark," Jericho said. "But these people here, they all saw him close up."

A curious moaning sound from many people, like a soft wind, seemed to fill the Mews.

"You saw him make the three attacks on the woman?"

"I did not," Jericho said. "I heard her scream. I thought it was a drunken brawl. The third time I went to the window of my studio to yell down at them, to tell them to cut it out. I saw the final attack. But I was too late to catch him."

The cop glanced at Lucinda. "You two were too busy to pay any attention to the noise of the first two attacks?"

Jericho reached out and tapped the cop on the chest. "One more crack at Miss Laverne and you're going to be in the center of a riot!"

The two men stared at each other, and a slow grin moved Jericho's lips. Then the cop took a notebook out of his pocket.

"Let's start at the beginning," he said.

The police captain's name was Welch. He had been summoned from his home and he was wearing civilian clothes. He was a sandy, wiry man with a hard face and bright bird's eyes that moved quickly from person to person, from object to object, as if constantly searching for something. When they fixed on someone or something they were intense and penetrating.

Welch sat at his desk in the precinct station. Jericho stood across the desk, facing him. A green-shaded droplight illuminated Jericho like an actor in a spot. In a far corner of the room Lucinda Laverne sat on a straight-backed chair, her hands locked in her lap. This was the culmination of three hours of waiting.

"It says here you're an artist." Welch touched some reports on his desk.

"I am."

"Subletting a studio in Jefferson Mews?"

"Yes." Jericho's huge shoulders moved impatiently inside his clothes.

"How do I know you're an artist?" Welch asked. "Anyone can grow a beard and say he's an artist. The Village is full of 'em."

"Will my credentials help you find a murderer?"

"Might."

Jericho reached forward before Welch could stop him, picked up a yellow pad from the desk, then took out a thick black pencil from his inner pocket. Quick, sharp lines were drawn on the pad. Then Jericho tossed it on the desk in front of Welch. The police captain stared at a brilliant, savage caricature of himself.

"Now, before you ask me a lot of questions of the kind your patrolman did," Jericho said steadily, "I was in my studio when Mary Brady first screamed. Miss Laverne was with me. She was there to pose for a mural I'm doing. Nothing else. I was preparing paints and canvas when we heard the first scream."

"You do your painting at two in the morning?"

"Often."

"You picked the Laverne woman up on the street?"

"I did. I saw something in her I wanted to paint. I asked her to model. She agreed. Period."

"You threatened a cop," Welch said.

"I called him stupid, if that's a threat."

"You handled him."

"I tapped him on the chest with this finger," Jericho said, pointing at the captain. "Instead of hunting for a killer who was still close by, your man chose to question Miss Laverne's behavior. There were dozens of witnesses. Your man didn't seem interested in them. I was burned up."

Welch pulled a surprise. "I've seen your painting of the Birmingham race riots in the Duckworth Gallery," he said. "It's good."

"It's very good," Jericho said, a faint smile twitching the corner of his mouth.

Welch leaned back in his swivel chair. "Were the police late in coming?" he asked.

"No—not after they were phoned. The incredible thing is that dozens of people watched it happen—three separate attacks—and nobody called."

"Public apathy is a disease of the times," Welch said.

"I just can't buy apathy as the answer," Jericho said. "Among three dozen people there has to be a spark of humanity somewhere."

"You didn't pay any attention to the first two screams," Welch said. "Account for that."

"God help me, I thought it was a drunken quarrel."

"None of your business?"

"I'm afraid that's how I felt."

Welch slapped his hand on the desk. "I have a couple of dozen descriptions of the killer here. Tall, short, thin, fat."

"He was only a shadow when I saw him," Jericho said.

Welch grimaced. "We questioned the witnesses. Their answers run something like this: 'I didn't want my husband to get involved,' one housewife said. 'We thought it was a lovers' quarrel.' 'I didn't want to get mixed up with the cops.' And so on and so on. Plus 'The cops never come on time anyway.' Well, we came as fast as we could after Miss Laverne turned in the alarm. Police procedures might be improved, but we can't get to trouble till we know about it. There are men who will jump into the river to rescue a drowning man. There are others who won't. They can't swim well enough; it's none of their business; a police launch will be along presently or ought to be."

"Let George do it," Jericho said bitterly.

"Something like that. But there may be more reasonable explanations for what happened tonight."

"I'd like to hear them."

"You didn't know Mary Brady?"

"Never saw or heard of her until tonight—until it was too late," Jericho said.

"Folk singer," Welch said. "Current craze of the teen-age kids. Her records sell like hot cakes."

"That Mary Brady?"

"That one," Welch said. "She used to sing in the coffee shops and small cafés here in the Village, getting nowhere, except for a small dedicated following. Pat Zander heard her somewhere, hired her for his club. He made her into a big name in the field. She rates along with Joan Baez, Odetta, Leon Bibb, Bellafonte, and names like that. I suppose Zander got a commission. He also got the girl. No secret they were living together."

"So?"

"We're only a few blocks from the waterfront here," Welch said. "This Patrick Zander runs a night spot, but we've been trying to nail him for a long time in connection with loan-sharking on the waterfront. A million dollar sideline operated from inside his hat. In spite of the Waterfront Commission, the Harbor Police, the Customs boys, the waterfront is still a lawless jungle. I've handled dozens of murders that were obviously seen, but there's never a witness—there's never a

witness to any criminal act on the waterfront. Witnesses get their backs or their legs broken, their eyes put out; their children get run over by trucks. Mary Brady was Pat Zander's girl. Pat Zander is a waterfront king. People in Jefferson Mews might have been afraid to report what they thought was a waterfront feud."

"Not everyone is afraid," Jericho said.

"A pointless point," Welch said. "Tonight everyone was involved with fear—or apathy. You pays your money and you takes your choice. The result is the same—we have no clear description of the killer." Welch leaned forward. "There's a man outside wants to talk to you."

"Who?"

"Pat Zander. Mary Brady's boy friend. You're the only person in Jefferson Mews who made any effort at all to save his girl. He wants to know what you saw and heard, I guess."

"I can't help him," Jericho said.

"Afraid to bear witness all of a sudden?" Welch asked drily.

"Don't be silly. I can't describe the man. I was too late."

Welch picked up the phone on his desk. "Send in Pat Zander."

"Can I have a drink of water?" Lucinda asked unex-

pectedly, from the shadows.

"Help yourself at the cooler," Welch said.

Jericho went over to the cooler, filled a paper cup, and took it to Lucinda. She looked up at him, and there was fear in her eyes. Her lips moved. "Be careful," she whispered.

Pat Zander came into the office, slamming the door behind him. Inner violence was frighteningly near the surface. He was a big man, as big as Jericho. He was ash-blond. His face was white, with two dark burned-looking holes for eyes.

"You come up with something?" he asked Welch, his voice raw.

"Nothing. This is John Jericho, who got there too late," Welch said.

Zander turned, almost toe to toe with Jericho. He had on a white sharkskin suit and a pink shirt with a black knit tie. His clenched hands were calloused rocks.

"You son of a—" Zander said. "Fooling around with a two-bit call girl when you could have answered Mary's first cry for help."

Jericho's fist moved less than a foot to the point of Zander's jaw. The night club operator's head snapped back and he went crashing down against the wall of the office. He didn't move.

"If you don't need me any

more," Jericho said quietly to Welch, "I think Miss Laverne and I will take a little fresh air."

Welch's face was a study in controlled satisfaction. "That's the first time anyone's laid a hand on Pat Zander in five years," he said. "It was overdue. I suggest the fresh air in the south of France might be a good place for a painter for quite a long spell. The Zanders of this world play for keeps, Mr. Jericho."

"Me too," Jericho said. He looked down at Zander. A little trickle of blood ran down the man's chin. "Where was he when his girl was screaming for help?"

"Working," Welch said. "Running his club. We picked him up there."

"Tell him he can find me in the Mews any time," Jericho said. "Come on, Lucinda."

At a garage about two blocks from the precinct house Jericho asked for his car. It was a Mercedes which he had been keeping there while he lived in the Mews. It was fire-engine red, with a custom-built body designed to store his painting paraphernalia on long trips. He held the door open for Lucinda when the car was brought out onto the street.

They had walked briskly from Captain Welch's office, Jericho's arm slipped casually

through hers. They had spoken just two sentences on the way.

"You shouldn't have done it because Pat Zander won't forget," Lucinda said. "He's got an arm to back him up."

"I had a ball," Jericho said.

The top of the Mercedes was down, and they drove through the dawn up the West Side Highway, cutting off in the hundreds to Riverside Drive.

"Place up here we used to call Lookout Point," Jericho said. "Nice place to watch the day begin."

Eventually he pulled to a stop and they sat there, looking down at the Hudson River and at the New Jersey Palisades, coppery red as the sun rose. There was a little compartment between the two bucket seats. Jericho opened it, revealing a bottle of brandy and a bottle of Irish whiskey. He took out two little silver cups.

"I never drink before five o'clock," he said, grinning at Lucinda. "It is now ten minutes past five. Which?"

"The brandy," Lucinda said. "I—I still haven't stopped shaking."

"All the comforts of home," Jericho said, pouring brandy into one of the silver cups. "As a matter of fact it is home. I travel around in this until I decide to light somewhere for some project. I keep a room at

the New York Athletic Club to store my clothes. Haven't slept there in five years." He poured Irish for himself and raised his cup. "Here's to the few vestiges of courage left in the world."

"Being reckless doesn't necessarily mean courage," Lucinda said.

Jericho gave her an interested glance. "You mean popping our blond friend back there? It's a habit of mine. I don't like to take it from anybody. I don't stop to think it over. Mr. Zander may be a little more careful with his mouth from now on."

"Was it worth having to spend the rest of your life looking over your shoulder for trouble?" Lucinda said. She sat hunched in the seat beside Jericho. "Zander runs that part of town."

"That's the way those people in the Mews felt," Jericho said. "Better to avoid trouble than to face it. Mary Brady is dead because of that attitude. Welch called it apathy. Just plain no guts, I say."

"Not everyone can bend iron bars like you, Mr. Jericho. How many of those people were physically equipped, do you think, to face a man with a knife?"

"They didn't have to face him. All they had to do was pick up a telephone."

"And be identified as the one who called the cops."

"Was Welch right—is cop a dirty word?"

"The cops never did anything for me," Lucinda said. "Oh, they'll arrest me for being on the street. With Mary Brady lying dead at their feet they ask me if I was soliciting. They're real quick about laws of that kind. You think they'll even come close to the man who killed Mary Brady?"

"I will if they don't," Jericho said.

She turned her head to look at him, her eyes wide. "You must be some kind of a nut!" she said.

"Honey, I just got my feet wet," Jericho said. "I can't back out of the water now." He took a sip of his whiskey, then looked at her gravely. "I'm really not a nut, Lucinda. You don't know much about painting, do you?"

"Nothing, really."

"You paint because you're driven to it," Jericho said. "Good painters like good poets have something to say. It may be a big thing, it may be a small thing. The poet says it in language the prose writer can't use. The painter says it in a way that can't be expressed in words at all. Maybe a small thing like 'Nature Is Beautiful.' It may be a bigger thing like 'Fascism Is

Evil.' Ever see Picasso's *Guernica* or reproductions of it?"

"No."

"I'll show it to you sometime." He emptied his silver cup and put it back in the compartment. "There are people who don't think I'm a good painter. Too literary, too intellectual, too concerned with a message. To hell with them. The answer is they can't bear the truth. Same way a lot of people can't bear to hear what Freud said about the human psyche."

"What happened tonight hit me right in the middle of where I live," Jericho went on, his voice harsh. "Maybe it began with human extermination in the Nazi gas chambers. How can a man be regarded as an animal, as a subpar, subnormal citizen simply because of his race, creed, or color? Is the struggle for a democratic world just an excuse we use to cover up a struggle for power? These are all fundamental questions leading up to the big one: What is the Truth, with a capital T, about man? What is the truth about all the senseless violence, the don't-care-ism, the apathy we saw tonight, the fear to recognize a stranger as your brother—or in the case of Mary Brady, as your sister?"

"That is what I hunt for all over the world, Lucinda. The

Truth. To be summed up some day in a final statement that will make all of us proud or ashamed, but in either case make us Men. Somehow in color, in design, in the emotional impact of the truth stated in visual terms, I hope to move people more than they can be by words, which can always be twisted around to mean two different things. There are no clever semantic tricks in my paintings."

He laughed suddenly. "Forgive the lecture. What I really mean to say is this: it's possible to guess how the Christians felt about the lions in the Roman arenas; but if you really want the truth about how they felt you've got to get down there with the lions yourself. I'll never know the truth about tonight, Lucinda—about all those people who stood by and watched a woman die—unless I get down in the arena."

"One way to get there was to make clear to Patrick Zander that when he calls me a dirty name he has to smile. I grew up on that line—from *The Virginian*. Zander will probably come after me, but that's the only way I know of finding out the truth about him and his world and making an unmis-takable statement about it."

"And that's important to you—making a statement?"

"It's my life," Jericho said. He grinned and reached in his pocket for his pipe. He'd filled it hours ago, just before he heard Mary Brady's final scream for help. At last he got to light it. "And the next most important thing, at this moment, is breakfast. I know a special place to get it."

The Mercedes headed downtown, turned east, and moved like a softly purring cat through Central Park. The special place to get breakfast was on Beekman Place—a modestly large, immaculately kept apartment house.

"You live here?" Lucinda asked, as Jericho opened the car door for her.

"I told you, I don't live anywhere," he said.

They went into the deserted lobby to a brass nameplate board with a house phone and buttons. Jericho found the name Fanning, put his finger on the button, and held it there. With his other hand he took the phone off the hook and held it to his ear. After a long time a woman's voice shouted into the phone so loudly that Jericho pulled it quickly from his ear.

"Cut that out!" the woman's voice said.

Jericho took his finger off the button. "Lee, my sweet. Breakfast, please."

"It's only just past six in the morning, you big ape!"

"I know."

"Sunday morning!"

"I know. I have a friend with me."

"You stinker!" There was a long sigh. "All right. Bring him up."

"It's a 'she,' dear."

"Double stinker!" the voice said, and there was the click of the phone being hung up.

"She's delighted to see us," Jericho said to Lucinda.

"I know. I heard her," Lucinda said.

"Her way of being affectionate," Jericho said. "Come on."

They got into the self-service elevator and Jericho pressed the button for eleven. At the end of the corridor on eleven the door to Apartment 11F stood ajar. Jericho pushed it open and gestured to Lucinda to precede him.

The living room of 11F had a charming, lived-in quality. No decorator had planned it. The rug was Oriental and costly. There was a three-paneled, carved Burmese screen with some sort of silk Chinese robe draped over one end of it. There was a Florentine desk, with a high-backed, delicately carved armchair behind it. There was a modern, deeply upholstered couch facing a fireplace. Nothing matched, but

everything looked loved.

The east wall was all windows, looking down over the East River, and sunlight poured through them. Over the fireplace was a portrait of a golden-haired woman, painted in bold, almost passionate strokes. Jericho's signature was vivid in the lower right-hand corner. On the west wall, its colors seeming almost to burst out of the canvas, was a still life of chrysanthemums. On the north wall was a self-portrait of the artist, looking like a red-bearded Viking.

From somewhere down the hall came the sound of a briskly running shower.

"Make yourself at home," Jericho said to Lucinda. "I'll see about coffee." He barged off in the direction of what was obviously the kitchen. He clearly knew his way around 11F.

Lucinda sat down in one corner of the couch. Her hands lifted to her face, and they were unsteady. She was fighting the recurrence of earlier tears. Whether she heard the shower turned off or not she gave no sign of it. She seemed unaware of the sudden appearance of Lee Fanning in the doorway.

Lee was the golden girl of the painting. She was wearing a maroon satin housecoat and mules. Her generous mouth was

a little too large, her nose a little too small to describe her as a classic beauty. But you would turn to look at her because of a kind of high-headed thoroughbredness—a special, individual charm.

"Hi," she said. "I'm Lee Fanning. You are the Stinker's friend."

"Lucinda Laverne."

"Welcome to our city," Lee said.

"Where the hell is the coffee?" Jericho bellowed from the kitchen.

"Coming, Master," Lee said. She winked at Lucinda and disappeared into the kitchen.

Jericho had the coffee made and was just plugging in the percolator. Lee noticed this without comment. She walked over to Jericho and was instantly taken into his arms. His kiss was tender, curiously gentle.

She pushed herself away from him but her hands still clung to his bulging shoulders. "This is a new one," she said. "Bringing your other women around at six in the morning."

"We've had a rather shocking experience, Miss Laverne and I," Jericho said.

"Do I get the first-aid kit?"

"You, my sweet, are the first-aid—you and breakfast."

"I don't care for the linkage."

"It's the best. What have you got to eat?"

"A steak for you. Juice and toast for Miss Laverne. She doesn't look your type, Jericho."

"Model," he said. "She could probably use an egg. We were witnesses to a brutal murder. The girl is somewhat shaken. Be nice."

"She's a medium-priced call girl. Right?"

"She's to be the symbol of courage for my poverty mural," Jericho said. "I punched a guy a while back for saying she was a two-bit call girl. Don't ire me, girl."

"I could smell Irish whiskey on your mustache, bub," Lee said. "What's the girl drinking?"

"Brandy. Where's the steak? You take her a drink and talk to her, nice-like, and I'll rustle food."

"Murder?" Lee said.

"That's the longest double take in history," Jericho said.

"I know your kind of elaboration," Lee said. "Murder, he says, and means somebody stepped on a tulip bud in the park."

"Not this time," Jericho said, his voice hard. Briefly he outlined the events of the evening, through his encounter with Pat Zander at the precinct house. "So if Lucinda suddenly starts screaming it means it's

just caught up with her."

"All those people watching!" Lee said, her eyes wide.

"Apathy, the police captain calls it. How apathetic would you be, watching a woman being stabbed to death?"

"I could freeze," Lee said.

"That I could understand if not admire," Jericho said. "I think I'd like to get George over here."

"He won't like being called at this time of the morning."

"He'd sell his mother into slavery for a scoop. I have a kind of scoop for him," Jericho said.

Lee waved toward the kitchen extension. "You call him, not me," she said. "I'll get your lady friend a drink and hold her hand. Steak's in the fridge."

Lee disappeared into the living room. Jericho turned on the oven broiler, found the steak, doused it with salt and pepper. Then he went to the wall phone in the corner of the kitchen and dialed a number. After five or six rings a man answered.

"George? Jericho."

"God help me," the sleepy voice said.

"I've recently been an eyewitness to a murder," Jericho said. "The police have my story, but so far no member of the fourth estate. Want it?"

"If this is some kind of gag—"

"I gag you no gags at this time of day," Jericho said.

"Where are you?"

"Lee's."

"Oh." George sounded like a man with a large wound.

"If you get over here fast you can share a steak with me and talk to another witness as well. Girl-type witness."

"So help me, Jericho, if this is—"

"See you," Jericho said cheerfully.

George Godfrey, byline reporter for the *Chronicle*, leaned back in his chair, having demolished one-third of the steak Jericho had cooked. Jericho was still working on his two-thirds. The girls sat in opposite corners of the couch, coffee cups on the low table in front of them. Godfrey lit a cigarette and refilled his coffee cup. He was a sharp contrast to Jericho—medium height, dark, very gentle.

"There's something you learn about news," he said. "Lightning always strikes twice—or more. A few weeks ago some kookie gent out in Queens shot his twelve-year-old daughter and then himself. The girl had some incurable disease. Next day another father in Brooklyn picked up the cue—

shot his small son and himself. There was a third one in Harlem a few days later. Your apathetic witnesses aren't new, Jericho. A lady bartender was killed under similar circumstances more than a year ago. Thirty-eight apathetic witnesses, as I recall. Another girl, couple of months later, was attacked and beaten to death in full view of some forty silent observers. Now your Miss Brady. There's nothing new on earth."

"Wrong, and I'll debate it with you some other time," Jericho said, putting down his knife and fork. "The world we're living in is very new, and the people around us are new, and they act and react in new ways. But we use old words to describe their new actions. Apathy!"

He snorted and reached for his pipe. "Fear is at the core of our today, George—fear of the bomb, fear of poverty, fear of people who say the hell with the law. Fear makes most of us inhuman. Waterfront war, my police captain suggests. Maybe. Better let someone die than get involved in some sort of family feud. That would be apathy. Incredible apathy. I think something else."

"What?" George Godfrey asked.

"I think it's more likely that every damned one of those

people knew the killer and was specifically afraid of *him*." Jericho glanced at Lucinda. "Not everybody is afraid of a generalized danger. But specific, identifiable danger is something else. One of those witnesses in the Mews can be broken. When it is done, the others will all remember what they pretended not to know tonight. If they can be sure the killer and his friends will be dealt with, they'll talk."

"Can you assure them the killer will be dealt with?" George Godfrey asked.

"I'll do it with my own little hatchet if necessary," Jericho said. He was smiling, but his bright blue eyes were cold and humorless.

"That could just be talk," George said. "That's not your world down there."

"The hell it isn't," Jericho said. "The whole world is my world, chum."

"Pat Zander will find the killer, Mr. Jericho," Lucinda said. "He has ways and means of covering every rathole in the city. It was his girl. It's his problem."

"It's everybody's problem," Jericho said. "George should make it the problem of everybody in New York City through his paper. I'm damned if I'm going to be like those people in Jefferson Mews who

saw everything and did nothing."

"What with punching a night club king and shoving cops around, you haven't left yourself in the position to carry on a quiet investigation," George said.

"My dear George, I'm the noisy type," Jericho said. "While I thunder and threaten, you will do the quiet stuff. Why do you think I got you up so early in the morning? Somewhere in Jefferson Mews there must be someone whose guts aren't too rusty. Someone who'll talk."

"It's not going to be easy," George Godfrey said. "I'll make you a small bet that your Mews is jammed at this very moment with hundreds of hysterical teen-agers, grieving over the passing of Mary Brady. They'll have trampled every possible clue to death."

"She was that popular?" Lee Fanning asked.

"The goddess of folk music," George said. "This isn't just a little back-alley horror. People all over the country are going to be focusing on Jefferson Mews."

"What can I do?" Lee asked.

"You stay out of it!" George said sharply.

"For the time being," Jericho said. He pushed back his chair and stood up. "Come,

Lucinda, I'll drive you home. As for you, George, down in the Mews you and I don't know each other. Connected with me you'd be useless. If we have messages for each other we make contact through Lee. Right?"

Lee reached out a slim hand and rested it on Jericho's arm. "Take care," she said.

His cold blue eyes softened for an instant. "I haven't turned my back on anyone for years," he said.

The Mercedes moved westward and downtown, through the light Sunday morning traffic. Lucinda, in the bucket seat next to Jericho, was staring straight ahead. At a pause for a changing light she gave him a side glance.

"Strange setup back there," she said.

"Oh?"

"Mr. Godfrey's in love with Miss Fanning, Miss Fanning's in love with you, and you aren't in love with anyone."

"You're really asking me a question, aren't you?" Jericho said. "There are several questions people always ask me. Am I in love with Lee? The answer is, she's the nicest girl I know. Do I sleep with my beard inside or outside the covers? The answer is, outside. Why don't I stick to my painting instead of

always looking for trouble? The answer is, you don't have to look for trouble in this world—it comes looking for you. The question should be whether you face it or whether you run. I face it, because, as I told you, I'm looking for some kind of Truth. This makes me bad husband material, to get back to your question." His expression became grave. "Will your having been with me tonight mean trouble for you?" "Who could care?" she asked.

"Someone who may think we saw more than we've so far admitted," Jericho said.

"There's something you may not know about my business, Mr. Jericho," Lucinda said, an edge of bitterness to her voice. "We don't talk. We don't talk about anything we see or hear. If we do we're marked 'dangerous' and then we don't do any business."

"Talk to me about your 'business' some other time," Jericho said. "You don't belong in it."

"I did two years in the state penitentiary for shoplifting," the girl said. "I wanted a little hat with a black veil. In this world of do-gooders you still don't get a decent job after that. They don't let you."

"Talk to me when this is over," Jericho said. He stopped

the car near the corner of Eighth Street and Greenwich Avenue. "I'm letting you out here, Lucinda. No point in having anyone see you come back into the neighborhood with me. You know where to reach me—at the Mews or through Lee Fanning." He took a wallet out of his pocket and extracted several bills. "Modeling fee," he said.

"I can't," Lucinda said. "I didn't earn it."

"You will," Jericho said. "I still want you for that mural. Call it an advance if you like."

She got out of the car, clutching the money. Standing on the curb, staring at him, she looked somehow small and helpless. The red-bearded giant in the car seemed reluctant to leave her.

"Something you haven't told me?" he asked. "Something that scares you?"

She shook her head, her lips a tight red slit.

"Don't lie to me, Lucinda!"

"I'm not."

Jericho drew a deep breath. "See you around."

The girl watched the Mercedes drift away across town. Then she opened her cheap little handbag and stuffed the bills into it. She searched the interior of the bag and found a dime. She walked a little way down the block to a sidewalk

telephone where she closed herself in the booth and dialed a number.

It was nine o'clock when Jericho reached the entrance of Jefferson Mews. Ordinarily it was a quiet, almost lifeless time of the day. Now the street outside the Mews was crowded with cars, including police vehicles. Two uniformed cops stood at the entrance to the Mews. They stopped Jericho as he approached.

"You got business in there?" one of them asked.

"I live here," Jericho said.

"Where?"

"Second floor studio—Number 29."

"You're the guy who slugged Pat Zander, aren't you?" the second cop asked.

"You mean I'm famous?" Jericho grinned.

"Okay, go ahead," the first cop said.

The Mews was jammed with a curiously silent crowd. They faced a building at the far end where a hearse stood outside the door. They were, Jericho noticed, mostly teen-agers. A high-pitched, hysterical sob broke the silence. Mary Brady's army of admirers was here to pay their respects.

Jericho elbowed his way quickly toward the door of Number 29. He had the

uncomfortable feeling someone might recognize him as the knight errant who had failed and that he might be mobbed. He got inside Number 29 and hurried up the dark stairway to the second floor.

Outside the door of the studio, rented from an artist who had wanted to spend some months in the country, he stopped. His huge shoulders seemed to hunch inside his corduroy jacket. The door stood two or three inches open. A small dangerous smile parted his bearded lips. He took a step forward and kicked the door wide open.

Reflected sunshine poured through the northern skylight. The blank canvas stood untouched on the easel. Jericho's paints and palette were exactly as he had left them. But canvases stacked along the wall had been moved, as though someone had looked through them.

A man sat in a dilapidated wicker armchair facing the door.

The man grinned at Jericho. "Figured you'd be coming back soon," he said. He was dark, broad-shouldered, with curly black hair. His nose was crooked. Jericho realized he had seen him around the Mews before.

"How did you get in here?"

Jericho asked. He was balanced on the balls of his feet, his hamlike fists hanging loose but ready.

"Passkey," the man said. "I'm Mike Guffanti. Handyman for the landlord. When the ceiling falls in or someone drops through the floor to the apartment below, I fix it." His grin was white, almost pleasant.

"So the ceiling hasn't fallen in," Jericho said.

"My being here is friendly," Mike Guffanti said. "Say, how do you paint that stuff? It's real good." He waved at the paintings stacked along the wall.

"Let's stick to the point," Jericho said.

Mike Guffanti chuckled. "I heard you knocked Pat Zander cold in the police station."

"'Heard'?"

"One of the cops in the precinct house is a brother-in-law of Mrs. Markowitz who lives down the Mews. Like a fire it spread."

"Am I a hero or a villain?" Jericho asked.

"It all depends on where you sit," Guffanti said. His smile faded. "There are some like me who think you're some kind of a nut. Cops are still around, Mr. Jericho. You could take that fancy red car of yours, pack up your stuff, and get the hell out of here—unless Mary Brady's

friends decided to take you apart... I'll help you if you want to load up now."

"I'm not going anywhere, Mike," Jericho said.

"It figured. But I thought I'd make the offer. Friendly, that's me. Call you John?"

"If you want to."

"You should learn to figure the angles, John."

"Such as?"

"People around here respect you for what you did this morning. You tried to help. You were late, but you tried. But there are certain kinds of reputations you can't upset. No one's ever hung one on Pat Zander and got away with it. He can't let it happen or someone else might try. They'll be holding a nice drunken wake for Mary starting this afternoon. Crowd's already gathering. The undertaker's brought the body back. She looks real good, they say. Fellow never cut her in the face. After Pat's received the mourners, he'll come looking for you."

"I'll be here."

Mike Guffanti shook his head. "You go and that'll be that. He'll be able to say you were scared and ran. That may be good enough for him. You'll know you weren't scared, and that should be good enough for you. Peace on earth."

"I'm staying here, Mike,

until we find out who killed Mary Brady and why no one lifted a finger to help her. Zander should consider me an ally, not an enemy."

"He won't."

"Why didn't anyone help her?" Jericho asked.

Mike Guffanti shrugged, pulled a cigarette out of his shirt pocket, and lit it.

"Were you in the Mews when it happened, Mike?"

Mike's black eyes danced. "Yep."

"And you didn't do anything?"

"I had a previous engagement," Mike said. "I was making love to my wife. Special Saturday night-Sunday morning edition. We don't hear nothing under those conditions."

"I've heard about you, come to think of it," Jericho said. "You're the wife-beater."

"Yep. Bertha's got a black eye right now. Wears it like a medal. Different people treat each other different. Bertha and I, we understand each other. She wouldn't like it if I treated her like one of them Park Avenue dames."

"There were a hell of a lot of people who were awake and not making love at two o'clock this morning, Mike. Why didn't they call the cops?"

Mike's eyes narrowed. "You're just slumming down

here, John. You don't know what it's really like."

"I want to know."

"That why you were spending time with Mabel Chernovsky?"

"She was modeling for me."

Mike flicked the ash from his cigarette. "Now I've heard everything," he said.

"That's the way it was," Jericho said evenly.

"Okay, I believe you. You're a nosy type guy, John. You ever nosed around the waterfront?"

"Not the way you mean. I've painted ships."

"I saw." Mike waved toward the stacked canvases. "They look great coming up the river. But that's not the story of docks, or shipping, or pilferage, or who's in the middle. Just a few blocks from here there's a whole new world, John—a different world. The waterfront. In spite of all the cleanup talk this world is run by big-shot racketeers who get rich on narcotics and God-knows-what-else. One of the big wheels in that world is the money-lender who has a big share of the community by the short hair. Interest, compounded. Guy borrows a hundred bucks and pretty soon he's paid back four hundred and still owes the first hundred. And they keep on paying—or else.

"Pat Zander runs a night club, but one of his real businesses is loan-sharking. Longshoreman out of work comes to Zander's back room and borrows. If he doesn't pay off Pat sees to it his neck gets broke. Zander has got to make it clear he means business. Everybody hates him, but everybody's afraid of him. It might leak over into the Mews here. Lot of these artists and writers might need to borrow a buck and they all know about Pat. So when something happens to Pat Zander's girl it looks like it might be part of the waterfront world. Who wants to get his neck broken for butting in? Let Zander defend his own. Let Zander get even for his own. No point in getting caught in a meat chopper."

"If this happened in a waterfront district I might believe it," Jericho said. "But the Mews doesn't represent any one class or type of people, social or economic. They can't all be afraid of Zander. They can't all be indifferent."

"How do you explain it then?" Mike asked. "Obviously no one but you wanted to take a chance. Frankly, I'm glad I was occupied and didn't hear it. And if you're going to play detective nobody around here's going to help you. Too damned

risky. The woods will be full of Zander's boys."

"Why have you bothered to warn me?" Jericho asked.

Mike's smile was wry. "Bertha wanted it."

"Your wife?"

"Yep. It was like this, see. Once Pat Zander pinched where he shouldn't in his club on Twelfth Street. She doesn't want him to have the satisfaction of being a big shot by knocking you over."

"I don't believe you," Jericho said.

"It's my story," Mike said. He got up from the wicker chair and stretched lazily. "Help I'll give you beforehand, John, but not after you mix with Pat a second time. You see, like I'm the handyman for the landlord, I could help you pack your stuff and take off. But I don't step into the middle of no war after it starts."

Jericho walked over to the square table beside his easel. He took the lid off a blue tin of tobacco and began to fill his pipe. "There's just one way you can help me, Mike," he said.

"You can try naming it," Mike said.

"Let Zander know I'm back."

Mike grinned. "Not necessary," he said. "The minute you walked into the Mews twenty people told him. Way to show

their sympathy. See?" He started for the door.

"Mike!" Jericho's voice was sharp. "Don't use the passkey again. I like my privacy."

"Sure. No need to use it again. I've spoke my piece."

"If anyone wants to give a real description of the man who killed Mary Brady, I'll listen, Mike."

"Don't sit up nights waiting for it," Mike said. "I feel sorry for a guy who gets into trouble because he don't know the score. But once he knows the score and still sticks his neck out—" He shrugged and was gone.

The sun poured down on the crowd in the Mews. It was going to be a hot day. The hearse moved slowly through the reluctant crowd, away from the corner house. Mary Brady's body was now lying in state in her little apartment.

A woman came out of one of the buildings across the way carrying something covered by a dish-towel. Food for the wake.

On the steps of the building next to the corner house a young man with a straggly beard stood up above the crowd, a guitar cradled in his arms. He began to sing. It was a hymn, done to rock-and-roll rhythm. *I Walked in the Garden*

Alone. After the first few words the crowd joined him, uncertain at first, then clear and loud. It had been one of Mary Brady's favorite songs.

The woman who had delivered the gift of food returned through the singing crowd toward her own house. A thin man in a dark suit stepped out of a doorway to intercept her.

"May I speak to you for a minute?" George Godfrey asked.

The woman looked around anxiously. "You a cop?" she asked.

"Would I ask you nicely if I was?" George said, smiling.

"Reporter?"

"Yes."

"What do you want?"

"They're holding a wake for Mary Brady today?" George asked.

"Yes," the woman said. "My name is Meloney. Mrs. Thomas Meloney. Spelled M-e-l-o-n-e-y. Most people spell it with an 'a.'"

"I'll make sure of it," George said. He went through the motions of making a note on the back of an envelope. "Isn't it rushing things? A wake the same day she was killed."

"Don't they sound wonderful, singing like that? It's a free day for everyone," Mrs. Meloney said. "I just took in a bowl of potato salad."

"It's a strange story, Mrs. Meloney," George said. "How so many people watched it happen and nobody lifted a finger to help Mary Brady or even to pick up a telephone and call the police."

Again Mrs. Meloney took an anxious look around. "There was that artist guy—he tried, but too late."

"But that was at the very end, as I understand it," George said. "Almost half an hour after Mary Brady screamed the first time."

"He had a girl up there," Mrs. Meloney said.

"But there were thirty-four other people, Mrs. Meloney. They didn't all have girls or fellows. Not one of them did anything."

"Screaming isn't unusual down here," Mrs. Meloney said.

"But they *watched it happening!*" George said. "They actually saw the man knifing Mary Brady."

"It was dark," Mrs. Meloney said. "You couldn't be sure what was happening."

"You saw it? You were one of the ones who saw it, Mrs. Meloney?"

A man's voice shouted from behind them. "Sally! Get the hell back in here where you belong!"

"Excuse me," Mrs. Meloney said, and was gone.

George Godfrey took a handkerchief out of his pocket and wiped his face. He had turned at the sound of the man's voice, but he'd seen no one.

Another woman carrying a cooking kettle headed for the Brady building. George started toward her. She glanced at him and hurried on. At the same moment a big man came out of the Brady building—a big blond man. He wore a white shirt, open at the neck, and a pair of white buckskin shoes. He came straight toward George, ignoring the singers.

"You want something, bud, you might as well get it from me," the man said to George. "I'm Pat Zander."

George looked him over slowly. Zander's angry eyes were bloodshot, and there was a strong smell of liquor about him.

"I'm Godfrey of *The Chronicle*," George said.

"You got 'reporter' written all over you," Zander said.

"May I express my sympathy," George said.

"What do you care?" Zander asked.

"I'm a human being. I'm sorry for the troubles of other human beings," George said.

"You want a story. You don't give a damn," Zander said. "These people are here to

pay their respects. I don't want any reporters around, making a fancy story out of it."

"How do you account for the fact that nobody was willing to help your girl last night?" George asked.

Zander looked as though he was trying to decide whether it would be fun to break George's arm.

"I talked to reporters at the police station," Zander said. "People are people. Down here they're no different than anywhere else. I'd give my right eye if one of them had the guts to pick up the phone. They didn't. It could have saved Mary—but people are people."

"If it had been my girl," George said quietly, "I'd be taking those witnesses apart one by one."

"I'll handle it my own way," Zander said. "I know how to square things for Mary."

"What are you going to do about the guy who knocked you cold in the police station?"

Muscles bulged along Zander's jawbone. "That's a private fight." He turned and looked up at the skylight of Jericho's studio.

"There's going to be a lot about this in the papers," George said. "About how nobody would lift a finger to help a famous woman in desperate trouble—just let her

die on the street. These people all knew her and none of them would act. Would you say they were your enemies, Zander?"

"I'd say it was time you took off," Zander said grimly.

"My job is to get an explanation of what happened," George said. "My paper isn't going to let the story die. The people of the city are going to want to know how it could have happened—how people could stand by callously and watch three separate attacks on Mary Brady. Maybe you take a poke at me, Zander, but there are a dozen other guys to follow up for me in case I can't go on with the job. It's not good enough to make some kind of one-word explanation for what happened, like 'fear' or 'apathy' or 'indifference.' There's a story behind the behavior of these people and it's my job to dig it out. You can help or not as you choose, but the story will be dug out."

George, watching the blond giant who faced him, drew some conclusions about him. Pat Zander wasn't just an impetuous powerhouse. There was a shrewd, calculating look in the bloodshot eyes.

"I'll level with you," Zander said.

George, an experienced reporter, braced himself for the runaround.

"You could say it's mostly my fault that things happened the way they did," Zander said. "We live tough down here and I'm one of the tough ones. I've scared people into keeping their noses out of my business. Time comes I need 'em to stick their noses in and they act the way I've learned 'em to act. They don't budge. They acted the way they've been warned they should act. It was tough it worked out that way for Mary—and for me."

"You figure someone tried to get at you by attacking your girl?"

"What else?" Zander said.

"It just doesn't smell like a revenge killing," George said. "It wasn't quick and clean and certain. He hacked at her, then went away, hacked at her again, then went away again. Then he came back a third time! A fumbler, or maybe a guy who got his kicks out of making it long and agonizing. Not a killer for a mob. Not a knockoff and a quick getaway."

"And it'll take me just as long to finish him when I find him," Zander said. "Long and slow and rough!"

"You and Mary got along well?" George asked quietly.

"Ask around, if you don't think so," Zander said.

"I will," George said. "If she was cheating—"

"That'll do, bud!" Zander said. "Mary never looked at another guy."

Up in the studio in Number 29, Jericho stood by the north window looking down on the Mews. He had watched George talking to Mrs. Meloney and Zander. His black pipe, cold, was gripped between his strong white teeth, and his fiery red eyebrows were drawn together in a scowl.

There was something fascinating about the slowly enlarging crowd in the Mews pressing forward toward the house where Mary Brady had lived and now lay in her coffin, the ravages of death obscured by the undertaker's art. In the beginning the crowd had seemed to consist almost entirely of teen-agers. But now there were people of all ages.

The bearded guitar player still led them in song, the voices curiously moving as they sang the music that had made Mary Brady famous, and apparently much loved. The inevitable television cameras had appeared at the mouth of the Mews, and reporters, equipped with walkie-talkie devices, were scrounging around for interviews with anyone who would talk.

A knock at the studio door turned Jericho around. With a gesture of impatience he

crossed to the door and slid back the bolt. Captain Welch stood outside.

"So you did come back," Welch said.

Jericho nodded.

"This isn't official," Welch said. "You don't have to ask me in."

"Help yourself. Box seat over there by the window."

Welch walked over to the window and stood looking down at the singers. "What do you make of it?" he asked.

"Festival of Death," Jericho said. "They're all having a great emotional binge over it."

"Liquor will presently be added," Welch said. "Once they open the doors for the viewing it will start to flow." He glanced at Jericho, towering beside him. "You recognize any of the faces you saw down there last night?"

Jericho shrugged. "I've been asking myself that," he said. "There was a woman, talking to a reporter. She took some food to the Brady house. She was the one who brought a quilt to cover the body with last night. There was another woman who did some talking to the cops, but I haven't seen her this morning. The rest—"

Jericho gave an angry tug at his beard. "If there's one thing I normally pride myself on it's my ability to observe detail—a

kind of photographic memory for the visual. There were dozens of faces in the windows last night, staring down at that killer knifing the girl. And now I draw a blank! It's as though they all wore identical masks. I was concentrating on the girl, and peering into the shadows for some sign of the murderer. When I yanked myself back from that and looked around for the faces at the windows they were gone."

"Only four or five people have come forward," Welch said. "They all agree with you that there were thirty-five or forty witnesses. We've talked to every person with apartments facing on the Mews. Some of them say they came to their windows too late to help. Some insist they never went to their windows at all—we know they're lying. No specific description of the man. Most of them admit they recognized Mary Brady. She had dark hair which she wore shoulder length. Unusual, attention-getting. She'd bend over her guitar when she sang and that dark hair would hang down around her face. She'd make little gestures of brushing it back from her face between choruses."

"You've heard her perform?"

Welch nodded. "A phenomē-

non of the times. Operating in my precinct. It got to be a habit to drop in at Zander's club around midnight to hear her. Once you started to listen to her—she got her hooks into you."

"That good?"

"Very good," Welch said. "You should pick up some of her records. I don't know how to describe it—a kind of purity."

"Purity!" Jericho sounded angry. "And living with Zander?"

"Loose phrase. Only a presumption," Welch said.

"You said so yourself."

"I shouldn't have said it," Welch murmured. "Zander doesn't usually hang around a girl for a year and not make it. So we assumed—" He shrugged. "She lived here in the Mews. He has an apartment over his club on Twelfth Street. He's handled her career. Manager. But she's never seen out with other men. Oh, they crowd around her in the club, but she never went anywhere with them. She didn't drink, didn't smoke. Those kids out there think of her as a kind of angel."

"You know so much about her," Jericho said. It was almost a question.

Welch gave him a quick, shy glance. "We've been on Zander's tail for a long time. I told

you we suspect him of loan-sharking. 'Suspect' is a technicality in this case. We know, but no one will testify against him. A guy like Zander could be in on a dozen rackets. So we check out on everything about him. Mary Brady was one of the things 'about him.' But I kid you not, Jericho. She had a strong appeal when you saw her as often as I did. I wouldn't like this case to go in the 'Unsolved File.' "

"I wouldn't like it either," Jericho said. He walked over to the window, scowling. "There have to be people down there who'll talk, people who felt about her the way you did."

"But they won't talk to me," Welch said.

"So you dropped by for a cup of coffee and a friendly chat," Jericho said. "Coffee in that electric percolator. Help yourself."

"No, thanks."

"So chat," Jericho said sharply.

"I gave you some advice," Welch said. "South of France, I suggested. So you're still here. Again I say South of France. Will you go?"

"Don't be a fool," Jericho said.

"People might talk to you if you stay in one piece long enough," Welch said. "If they see you're back. If they see

you're not scared. I think maybe the wrong girl was killed for the jungle law of see-nothing, hear-nothing, tell-nothing to hold up this time."

Jericho looked down at the singing crowd. Their voices were louder. They seemed to be developing a kind of religious frenzy.

"It's my intention to pay my respects to the dead," he said.

Welch's eyes narrowed as he lit a cigarette. "You're going to the wake?"

"Seems to be a public affair. I'd like to say a small prayer for the girl and ask her forgiveness."

"Forgiveness?"

"For not listening to her cry for help until it was too late."

"You're a romantic," Welch said.

"You're an unusual policeman," Jericho said. "Of course I'm a romantic. Love affair with life, and a feud with death. That's me."

"I have the machinery to close in with," Welch said, "if I had two witnesses."

"Two?"

"That's the law."

"The law, the law, the law!"

"It protects everyone—the good and the bad," Welch said.

"If I get on the trail of this guy, I won't wait for two witnesses to settle with him," Jericho said.

"Leave the settling to me," Welch said. "I don't want to have to tangle with you."

"I'll play the cards as they fall," Jericho said.

"You'll keep in touch?"

"Fair enough. When there's anything to tell, I'll tell you."

Welch gestured toward the window. "Zander won't welcome you down there."

"I'll welcome his lack of welcome," Jericho said.

"Miss Otis regrets

"She's unable to dine tonight, Madam—"

The voices in the Mews rose in the slow rhythm of a dirge. The famous satirical ballad sung by those young voices had all the quality of a genuine hymn of grief.

Jericho, now wearing a dark-gray tweed suit and a black knit tie with his white shirt, edged into the outer fringe of the crowd, moving toward the house where Mary Brady's body lay. The first few yards, gently shouldering his way through the traffic jam of mourners, attracted only some irritated glances. Then a shrill voice broke out over the music.

"He's the one! He's the one who tried to help her!"

The singing broke off in mid-phrase. They swarmed around him like a rising sea, babbling questions.

"You must have seen the man!"

"Why didn't you go after him?"

"Did Mary speak to you?"

"What did she say? Didn't she name him?"

"Shut up! Give him a chance to talk!"

There was sudden silence. Young faces, twisted by sorrow, stared at him eagerly. Jericho glanced over their heads to the door of Mary Brady's house. A line that had started to move slowly in and out of the house had stopped, puzzled by the sudden end of the singing.

"I can't help you," Jericho said in a loud voice, "but there are people here who can."

"Who?"

"Tell us!"

"Listen to me!" Jericho thundered, and they were silent. "Thirty or forty people watched it happen. Some of them must have seen clearly. Some of them could probably tell you the man's name. Ask them! Insist on an answer. I saw only a shadow. I was too late. She never spoke to me. She was dead when I reached her."

A murmuring wail seemed to run over the crowd.

"I would like to pay my respects," Jericho said.

For the moment he was one of them. They opened a way, and he walked toward the

house, into the shade cast by the overhanging buildings. He stepped into the line that had started to inch forward again. A man in a black suit, obviously one of the undertaker's staff, stood at the door.

"We'd like to keep the line moving," he said in a somber voice. "If you are a personal friend there are refreshments being served in the garden at the rear."

Mary Brady's apartment was on the ground floor of the house. It had not been lavishly furnished, and now those furnishings had been moved from the living room to make space for the coffin, banked by white flowers, and a dozen or so folding chairs from the undertaker's. People in the line went to the chairs, sat for a moment with bowed heads, praying, then rose and walked slowly toward the coffin.

At the back of the room Jericho, his eyes bright and hard, glanced quickly around, looking for Zander. There was no sign of him. From behind a closed door in the far corner which opened into the garden came the incongruous sound of muffled laughter.

Jericho had no formal religion. He slipped into one of the chairs and lowered his head. His lips moved.

"Wherever You are, and

whoever You are, help her," he said softly.

Then he stood up and returned to the line, towering over a small woman who was in front of him. This little woman reached the coffin, knelt, kissed it, rose, and moved hurriedly on. Jericho, his muscles suddenly tense, was at the coffin, looking down.

The quality of this girl had escaped him in the early hours of the morning when he had held her in his arms, the last warmth of her blood staining his hands. The moment had been incredibly violent. Now he saw her, serene in death, her dark hair framing her face. Even in death there was something about her that explained the adoration of the young people outside. She must have aroused an impulse to protect her when she was alive. It was there now—a silent plea for help.

"I'm sorry, baby," Jericho heard himself say. "I was too damned concerned with my own piddling little project."

He took a quick look around the room, stepped out of the line, and opened the door to the garden. For a moment the quiet of the chamber of death was jarred by a man's high-pitched laugh, and then Jericho closed the door behind him and walked out into the sunlight.

Two long tables, covered

with white cloths, were stretched from one wall of the small garden to the other; the tables were weighted down by dishes of food. There was a cold turkey, a ham, a roast of beef, and assorted salads and relishes. There were plates of sliced Italian bread and bowls of butter. There was a large supply of liquor in bottles and many glasses. An ice machine had supplied a mountain of cubes in a cast-iron pail.

The laughter came from a group of hard-looking men. Jericho labeled them "water-front." Pat Zander, now wearing a dark suit with his white buckskin shoes, stood in the center. Jericho didn't hear the joke that had caused the laughter.

Separated from the men were a group of about a dozen young people who seemed to represent the crowd outside. Among them was a tall sad-faced Negro. He was the only one in the garden who seemed to notice Jericho's sudden appearance. He took the few steps that brought him face to face with the artist.

"You're Jericho," he said in a husky voice. "I'm Harry Baker. I play the piano in Zander's club. Mary was my friend. I wanted to thank you for trying."

"Too late, too little."

"You tried," Baker said. "That's more than anyone else can say. You crazy, man, coming here?"

"I don't think so."

"Pat and his friends have plans for you," Baker said. "I don't think they'll start anything here, so that gives you time to put distance between you and them, man."

"I'm not going anywhere, Mr. Baker, until the man who's responsible for Mary's death is identified and made to pay."

"It's your hide, man," Baker said with a little shrug. "Want I should get you a drink?"

"No, thanks. But you can answer some questions."

"You can ask them."

"I didn't know her," Jericho said. "How did she fit with Zander?"

The grave, dark eyes stared steadily at Jericho. "Gratitude," Baker said. "Obligation. He made her famous. She felt she owed him."

"She loved him?"

"You got to make a definition of that word—love," Baker said.

"Was there any other man?"

"All of us," Baker said slowly. "All of us loved her. But not the way you mean. No other man."

"You think it could simply have been some psychopathic stranger?"

Baker lowered his eyes. "It'll say so in the papers," he said.

"But you don't think so?"

"Man, what I think couldn't matter to nobody."

"To me," Jericho said.

Baker hesitated. "She left the club early, like she had a date. Kept looking at her watch, then left early. Pat asked me if I knew where she was going. I told him I thought she was going home. What else could I tell him? She didn't confide in me. But I thought she had a date with someone."

"No idea who?"

"No, man. And maybe if I did I wouldn't tell you. I'm like those people out there early this morning. I don't want any involvement. No, man."

Jericho was about to ask another question when the comparative quiet of the garden was shattered by Zander's voice, loud and angry.

"Out! Out of here—now!"

Jericho spun around, thinking the words were directed to him—that Zander had only just spotted him. But Zander wasn't looking at him. He had moved out of his group of friends toward the door to the house. Standing just inside was Lucinda Laverne. She had backed away at the sound of Zander's voice so that she was leaning against the closed door, her face dead-white.

"We don't want anybody like you here pretending grief!" Zander said. "Get out!"

Jericho touched Baker's arm. "Talk to you later," he said.

"Easy, man," Baker whispered.

Jericho took several quick strides across the garden so that he stood beside the trembling girl.

"I was looking for you," she said.

Jericho gave her a reassuring pat on the shoulder. His bright blue eyes were fixed on Zander's face. "This is where I came in," Jericho said.

"Later!" Zander said. "You and I will have it out later." He didn't turn but he spoke to his friends behind him. "Take a good look at him, boys. This is the one."

"I'd like it now," Jericho said.

"I don't want that woman here," Zander said. "It soils the occasion. And you soil the occasion. Better advise her to go—and you go with her."

"Please!" Lucinda whispered.

Jericho ignored her. He took a step closer to Zander. "I don't like what comes out of your mouth," he said. "I think I'd like you to apologize to the lady."

"Lady!" Veins stood out on Zander's forehead, but for some

reason he controlled what was obviously an overwhelming rage.

"Now," Jericho said softly. His body moved slightly, balanced on the balls of his feet.

Zander spun around, his hands clenched at his sides, shaking. "Just go away," he said. He seemed to be strangling. "Sorry I blew my top."

Jericho stared at him, puzzled. It seemed out of character for Zander to back down, especially surrounded by his strongarm friends. Lucinda was tugging at Jericho's sleeve.

"Please come," she said.

Jericho glanced at Baker. The solemn pianist's lips moved in what might have been a silent prayer. His eyes were lowered.

"I want to make it easy for you, Zander," Jericho said. "But play it your way. Any time, any place suits me."

Zander lowered his head, apparently fighting for control. He didn't speak. His group of friends stared at Jericho hungrily.

Jericho shrugged and turned to Lucinda. "Let's go," he said.

Lucinda's arm was cold as ice. Jericho opened the door to the inner room and they stepped through into the stillness where Mary Brady lay. Curious faces lifted to look at them, but the line of mourners

kept moving slowly, steadily, past the dead girl.

Jericho and Lucinda edged out into the sunlight of the Mews. The singing had stopped and the crowd had thinned a little. Most of them had worked their way into the line that would pass through the house.

Lucinda almost ran, with Jericho striding beside her.

"I saw you go in," she said. "I was afraid of what might happen to you."

"I don't get it," Jericho said. "Why didn't something happen? The odds were all with him and his friends."

"Witnesses," Lucinda said. "I didn't know Harry Baker and those others were there, or I wouldn't have gone in. Zander won't indulge in any public violence. The police are too interested in him, too eager for an excuse to nail him. But now you've made it ten times worse for yourself. You forced him to back down in public."

"Good for his soul," Jericho said.

"For God's sake, it's no joke!" They had reached the mouth of the Mews. "Please, Mr. Jericho, drop this. Go away."

"It's just getting interesting," Jericho said, his eyes cold. "But what about you? Will he be saving up something for you, now?"

"I—I can take care of myself," she said in a low, frightened voice.

"I think not," Jericho said. "You get a few things together and take a taxi to Lee Fanning's place. I'll phone her you're coming. Stay there for a day or two till things straighten out."

"I couldn't do that. It's not fair to involve her."

"Who will know? Which is the point, Lucinda. You just disappear for a while. If you argue with me I'll have to take you there myself."

"I don't think I—"

Jericho's hand closed over her arm and he steered back into the Mews. A man in a dark suit stood in one of the doorways.

"There's George Godfrey," Jericho said. "Don't look at him or pay any attention to him."

He led her to a spot directly in front of the doorway where George stood. He bent toward her as though he were talking to her, but his voice was raised so that George could hear him.

"Our Lucinda has stuck her neck out, George," Jericho said, smiling at Lucinda. "I want her to stay with Lee for a while. She argues. I want you to take her there, George."

"You saw Zander?"

"We both saw Zander," Jericho said. "Lucinda isn't

safe. So do what I tell you. I'll phone Lee."

"What about you?" George asked.

Jericho chuckled. "*I'm bidin' my time*," he said. "*That's the kind of guy I'm.*" Now you be a good girl, Lucinda, and obey orders."

Standing by the window in his studio Jericho talked to Lee Fanning on the phone.

"George is bringing her," he said. "Knowing George, he'll make certain he isn't followed. Once the girl is with you, Lee, she's safe."

"Of course." Lee's voice was clear and steady.

"I wouldn't involve you in this if I could see any way she can be traced to you, Lee."

"I don't mind being involved." And when he didn't speak, "What about you?"

"I begin to smell fish," Jericho said. "A large, decaying fish. But I can't put it together yet. So I wait here in my box seat and watch."

"Is it worth it, Jericho?"

"My darling Lee, don't you know that's my trouble? I can't mind my own business."

"I know it only too well," Lee said, a note of bitterness in her voice.

The sun rose in the sky and it was hot in the Mews. The line

of viewers still seemed endless, moving slowly in and out. Sitting at his window, chewing on the stem of his cold black pipe, Jericho kept watching the door of the Brady house. Neither Zander nor any of his friends had left the building.

Shortly after noon Harry Baker, the piano player, walked quickly out of the house, across the Mews, and out of sight. His was the only familiar face that Jericho saw in what seemed to be an endless vigil.

Soon after that the phone rang. It was Lee. George had arrived with Lucinda. George himself got on the wire and assured Jericho they hadn't been followed. He'd taken a long excursion around and through Central Park and changed cabs twice.

"The girl says they'll wait until they can get you alone," George said. "Do you have to be a hero?"

"I have to satisfy my curiosity," Jericho said. "You want to make like a reporter again?"

"Could be."

"Check on a man named Harry Baker who plays the piano at Zander's Twelfth Street Club. I think he'd like to talk, but he's afraid to. Maybe he has a record. You might find something that would loosen his tongue."

"I don't get it," George said. "What can he talk about unless he was there and saw something?"

"He hinted to me that Mary Brady had a date last night, that she went back to the Mews to meet someone. I think he may know who that someone was, but I don't think he'll tell unless we find a way to twist his arm."

"You think the Brady girl was killed by someone she had an appointment with in the Mews?"

Jericho hesitated. "Or someone who wanted to prevent her from keeping that appointment," he said.

"Okay, I'll get on to Baker," George said. "Not that I love you, but watch your step."

As the afternoon lengthened, the line of viewers continued to file in and out. Jericho made himself a pot of coffee and a sandwich and sat by the window, watching, waiting, watching.

A little after three his phone rang again. It was Captain Welch.

"Glad you're in," Welch said. "I have news."

"Good, I trust," Jericho said.

Welch's voice sounded odd. "I have my two witnesses," he said.

"To the killing!"

"Yes. Two people who have identified the Brady girl's murderer."

Jericho's breath eased out of him in a long sigh. "Who?"

"You," Welch said tonelessly.

"What?"

"You," Welch said. "A man and a woman, both living in the Mews, identify you positively. They saw you come back three times, stab the girl each time, and then come back again and pretend to help her."

"So!" Jericho said softly. "So it's come to that. The chips are down..."

"I'm calling you, unofficially, from a phone booth," Welch went on, "I'm leaving the precinct house in about five minutes with a couple of men to pick you up. I have to act on the information."

"Why are you telling me?"

"Because I think it's a fake," Welch said. "But they can make it stick. There'll be more witnesses who'll come forward. They'll wrap you up for the D.A. like a Christmas package."

"I have a witness to what I was doing and where I was when the screaming began."

"The Laverne girl?"

"Yes."

"Not the best of character witnesses. But hang onto her in case I find you."

"In case?"

"You damned fool, I'm calling to tell you to take a powder!" Welch said, suddenly angry. "If you stay out of sight we may still latch onto the right guy. I pick you up and the case'll be closed faster than you can say Jack the Ripper. Get going—you have no more than a fifteen-minute headstart."

Jericho put down the phone and stood very still for a moment, staring down at the long line of mourners in the Mews. Then he turned quickly away and went to his closet. He changed back into his loose-fitting corduroy jacket, checking on his pipe, pouch, and wallet. As he slipped on the jacket, he stared, frowning, at the stack of canvases against the wall. He seemed reluctant to leave them.

But his decision was made, and he turned abruptly, stalked out into the hall, and locked the door behind him. He moved quickly and silently down the stairs.

Mike Guffanti, ex-prizefighter turned handyman, was lounging by the front door. There was something different about him. He wasn't smiling. His face had a kind of ash-gray look to it.

"Goin' out, John?" he asked.

"The heat is suddenly on,"

Jericho said. "Is there a back way out of here, Mike?"

Mike Guffanti moistened his lips. "No."

"Where does that door at the back of the hall lead?"

"Basement."

"And no way out of the basement?"

"No."

"You're lying, Mike," Jericho said quietly.

Mike Guffanti moved, casually, so that he stood between Jericho and the back door. "Have it your way," he said. "But if you go out you got to go out the front."

"You've changed sides. Right, Mike?" Jericho asked.

Mike's hands opened and closed at his sides. "Maybe."

"I'm leaving by the back way, Mike," Jericho said. "Let's not have any trouble about it."

The ex-prizefighter raised his hands awkwardly. "You'll have to go through me, John," he said.

Jericho's left shot out and caught Mike on the jaw. Mike led clumsily with his left and Jericho's right smashed against his mouth. Mike's knees turned to rubber and he sank down, a silly smile on his bruised lips. But he reached out and clung to Jericho. Jericho tried to wrench free.

"Make it look good, John," Mike whispered.

Jericho stared at him, his eyes wide. Mike was deliberately taking a beating. No former pro would have handled himself so badly.

"Hurry!" Mike whispered.

Jericho's right raked the grinning face, leaving a scarlet bruise across Mike's cheek. Mike went down and lay on his side, his eyes closed. Jericho stepped over him and opened the back door.

It led to an alley stacked with garbage cans. There was a high board fence opposite the door, obviously blocking off the gardens of houses in the next street. Jericho bounded toward it, jumped, grabbed the top of the fence, and pulled himself over. In a small ill-kept garden on the other side he hesitated, listening. There were no sounds from the Mews, no cries for help from Mike.

Jericho found an alley between buildings. He ran along it and out onto the street. By some miracle a taxi was just cruising by. Jericho flagged it.

"Times Square subway station," Jericho said, and slumped down in the back seat of the cab. After they had driven a few blocks he straightened up in the seat and looked out the rear window. Sunday traffic was moderate. There was no sign of anyone tailing them.

"Something wrong?" the driver asked.

Jericho glanced into the rear-view mirror. "Running out on my wife," he said.

The driver laughed. "She don't beat you, does she? You look pretty big for the average dame."

Jericho lowered his eyes to the man's license in its metal frame. "Sean Flannery. Well, Sean, I just don't want to be caught," Jericho said.

Shrewd Irish eyes glanced up at the mirror. "I'd say no one was tailing you, but you want me to give it the Houdini treatment?"

"Whatever that may be."

Brakes squealed and the cab shot east off Fifth Avenue and raced the crosstown block to Park Avenue South, swung downtown, cut east at the next block, then raced back to Fifth.

"Breathe easy, Mister," the driver said as he slowed his pace and started north on Fifth again. "No one following."

On Thirty-ninth Street they headed west and then up Sixth to Forty-second and west again to Times Square. Jericho climbed out and paid off.

"Thanks for the joy ride," he said.

"You could be Irish with that beard," Sean Flannery said. "Only an Irishman can run from a dame with honor."

Jericho grinned at him and walked quickly to the subway entrance. He would not be forgotten by Sean Flannery if there was a public alarm for a big man with a red beard. For that reason he had not taken the cab to his destination.

He took a Queens train and got out at its first stop on the East Side. From there he strode toward Lee Fanning's apartment on Beekman Place. In the lobby of the apartment house Jericho gave Lee's buzzer the special ring that would identify him.

There was no answer.

Frowning, he walked to the self-service elevator and rode up to the eleventh floor. No one answered his ring at the door of 11F. He hesitated for a moment, then took a keyring from his pocket, selected a key, and unlocked the door. He went in, calling out Lee's name.

Still no answer.

The two girls weren't in the apartment. Everything seemed to be in order. The breakfast dishes had been washed. The coffee percolator, half full, unplugged, stood on the kitchen table.

Jericho went back into the living room. On a small table near the front door he saw one of Lee's handbags—the one he had given her for her last birthday. He opened it. Her

keys were in it; her change purse, a compact and lipstick; a handkerchief; a memo book with a grocery list scrawled on its front page. If Lee had gone out, taking another bag, wouldn't she have at least transferred the keys and change purse to the bag she took with her?

Jericho hurried to the bedroom. No disorder, and no sign whatever that Lucinda Laverne had ever been there.

Jericho returned to the living room and checked the front door. It hadn't been left on the latch. Without her keys there would have been no way for Lee to get back in without rousing the janitor for the use of his passkey.

Jericho stood in the center of the room, his thick red eyebrows drawn together in a deep scowl.

The phone rang.

Jericho moved quickly, but hesitated when his big hand closed on the instrument. Then he picked it up and spoke in a muffled voice.

"J. J.'s Delicatessen," he said.

"What? What the hell's wrong there, John?" It was George Godfrey.

"No women," Jericho said.

"What do you mean?"

"Just that. No women. How did I get in? I don't like to jar

your moral code, George, but I have a key."

"All hell's broken loose down here," George said. "They're looking for you. Cops, plus Zander's friendly little mob. They found the handy man you beat up. But where are the girls?"

"I had hoped you could tell me," Jericho said. "Lee left without her keys, her change purse, and other necessary female do-dads."

"Damn it, John, I never wanted Lee mixed up in this mess."

"You told me you were sure you weren't followed here when you brought Lucinda."

"I wasn't. You must have been followed this morning in that fire engine of yours."

"I wasn't," Jericho said.

"Maybe they just went out to a movie or something," George said, not hopefully. "I told them not to leave the apartment till we knew what the score was. But maybe they got restless."

"Without a key to get back in?" Jericho asked.

"You know women—they forget things."

"All right. Now we've played that game out, how do you really figure it?"

"We're both sure we weren't followed but one of us must be wrong," George said. "But

where would they go? Or why would someone force them to go somewhere, John?"

"It's part of a frameup—of me," Jericho said. "The cops know it. I was warned by Welch, the precinct captain. The killer wants me off his back. I wish I knew what I had on him that makes me so dangerous."

"You'd better get out of there, John," George said. "Do I tell Welch what's happened—that the girls are gone?"

"You tell him," Jericho said. "But tell him you found it out on your own. Don't mention me. I don't want to burden him with facts he'll feel he has to act on."

"Will do."

"Did you get to talk to Harry Baker?"

"Haven't been able to locate him yet."

"Listen, George," Jericho said. "You haven't talked to me, you haven't heard from me, you don't know where I am. Clear?"

"I don't like it, John. I'm scared for the girls."

"Me too," Jericho said grimly. "I wasn't followed here, but there might have been someone stationed across the street, watching for me. Whatever we do we'll have to do it fast. Talk to Captain Welch, and then go find Harry Baker. He's

our one small lead."

Captain Welch's face was a rigid mask of fatigue. He'd been called out of bed shortly after two in the morning, after one hour's sleep, to deal with the murder of Mary Brady. It was now late in the afternoon. He needed a shave. His eyes were red and dry-looking, as if they burned. He listened to George Godfrey's story without comment.

"Let me get this straight," he said. "Jericho turned over the Laverne girl to you with instructions to deliver her to Miss Fanning for safekeeping. You took her there and you're sure you weren't followed."

"Right."

"Now they're gone, without word to you, and Miss Fanning left her bag, with keys and change purse, inside the locked flat?"

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"Because—because the keys and purse are there!"

"So how did you get into the apartment, Mr. Godfrey, to know that the keys and purse are still there?"

"Well, I—"

"Suppose you and I stop playing games with each other," Welch said wearily. "That's where Jericho went when he skipped out of his studio earlier

this afternoon. You've been in touch with him there."

"No!"

"All right, Mr. Godfrey. This office isn't bugged. What you say here is to me. But if you don't want to say it, at least let's understand that I know what you're talking about. Now, you imply that somebody—probably the man who killed Mary Brady—had the girls taken away from that apartment against their will. Why?"

"Maybe he thinks they know something," George said.

"Kidnaping is a serious crime," Welch said. "We can throw the whole book at someone for that. As I said before, suppose we stop playing games. Just what does Jericho know?"

"Nothing. I mean, he doesn't know what it is he's supposed to know."

Welch's mouth twisted in an exasperated grimace.

"My guess is that Jericho thinks Zander was involved in Mary Brady's murder," George said. "But he has no evidence."

"Zander? But Mary Brady was Zander's girl!" Welch said.

"I know. John knows."

"And he still thinks Zander's involved?"

"That's my guess, Captain."

"Okay." Welch lit a cigarette, puffed hard, then looked as if the cigarette had no flavor.

"You want me to look for the girls. We have to walk softly, Mr. Godfrey. If it is a kidnaping. What next?"

"I'm trying to locate a man who plays the piano at Zander's club. Name of Harry Baker."

Welch's eyes narrowed. "I know him. Lives in the neighborhood. Why do you want him?"

"John thinks he knows something."

Welch took another deep drag on his cigarette. "This begins to get real sticky, Mr. Godfrey," he said. "Harry Baker used to be one of the top jazz piano players in the country. He still is—but he's not professionally reliable. He's an addict."

"Heroin?"

Welch nodded. "We know it. We could pick him up. We have picked him up a couple of times. Two trips to Kentucky. As soon as he gets back the boys find him and start him off again. Behaves himself. No point in whipping him, and we know he won't reveal his source. None of them will. Mary Brady got him his job at Zander's club. He'd been working in some dive with her when Zander discovered her."

Welch nodded slowly. "Baker owed Mary. He liked her. He might want to help, but he won't, Mr. Godfrey. They'd cut

off his supply. He couldn't stand that."

"I could try if I knew where to find him," George said.

"I'll get you his address," Welch said, picking up the phone on his desk. "We know where all the addicts in our precinct live."

He asked the desk sergeant for the address and wrote it down on a piece of paper. "Your friend Jericho's a romantic type guy, wouldn't you say? Damsels in distress appeal to him. Well, he's got a hatful of them right now."

"He's a lone wolf," George said. "Kind of a crusader. He runs cockeyed risks himself, and he expects other people to run cockeyed risks. I asked him to keep Lee Fanning out of this."

"She goes for crusaders?"

George's mouth tightened. "She's in love with him," he said.

"You with her?"

"Yes, God help me," George said.

Welch pushed back his chair. "I'll put a flea in your ear, Mr. Godfrey," he said. "I told Jericho we've been trying to get the goods on Zander for a long time. We have a dossier on Zander as long as your arm—suspected activities, lists of friends and associates. My flea is this: on that list of

friends and associates is the name of Mabel Chernovsky—Lucinda Laverne to you."

"But according to John, Zander blew his top at the sight of her—flew at her here in your office, flew at her later at the wake."

Welch shrugged. "All the same, she is or was connected with Zander."

"What are you trying to tell me?" George asked.

"Just that she may not be in as much trouble as your friend Miss Fanning," Welch said.

George Godfrey paused on the third-floor landing of a small apartment house on Jane Street. From up above came the sound of a piano, crisply played in jazz rhythm, with a solid left hand and a virtuoso right. As *the Saints Go Marching In*, with brilliant variations.

Harry Baker was at home, and evidently feeling no pain.

George climbed the top flight of stairs and knocked on the door of the apartment from which the music came. Nothing happened until he repeated the knock several times. The music ended in an impatient discord, then the door was yanked open and the Negro piano player looked out, bright-eyed and hostile.

One look was enough for George. Harry Baker had had a

recent fix and was flying high.

"I'd like to talk to you, Harry," George said.

"Some other time, man."

"Now," George said. "It's important. About Mary Brady."

A spasmodic twitch lifted the corner of Harry Baker's mouth. "You hear me playing in there, man? That was Mary's favorite beat tune. I was hoping she could hear it somewhere." His eyes narrowed. "You a cop? I don't recognize you from these parts."

George hesitated. "I'm George Godfrey, a friend of John Jericho's," he said.

"He needs friends," Harry said. "I can't help you."

"Let me be the judge of that?"

"I saw him at the wake," Harry said. "He don't make sense, man. You don't mess around with Zander unless you hold all the cards, and then some."

"May I come in and talk to you a minute?"

A little shudder seemed to move inside Harry Baker's clothes. "I don't want any part of what's going on, man. Like I said, I can't help you."

"Maybe if you won't answer questions I'll know which are the important ones," George said.

"Sorry."

"I don't want to get rough

with you, Harry, but I'll tell you how it is. The whole city is looking for John on a bum murder rap. He didn't kill Mary Brady, and you know it. While he's trying to save his own skin, his girl and that Laverne woman have been kidnaped. That's supposed to tell Jericho to lay off—or else. I'll tell you this, Harry: if anything happens to that girl—Jericho's girl—neither he nor I will let up as long as we live. The first thing I'd arrange would be to have your supply cut off—forever, man. Because, in spite of what you say, I think you can help."

"Supply?" Harry's voice was hollow.

"Let's stop talking in circles, Harry. You know exactly what I mean."

Harry stepped back from the door. "Come in," he said. "You play kind of rough yourself, man."

It was darkish in the apartment. The only windows in the place opened on a court which the sunshine of late afternoon had passed by. Music in manuscript was scattered on the upright piano and on the floor around it. The furniture belonged with a cheap rented room. Ashtrays were piled high with old butts. There was a glossy photograph of Louis Armstrong thumbtacked to the wall, with an inscription to

Harry Baker written across the bottom of it.

"You want a drink or a cup of coffee?" Harry asked.

"I want to talk," George said. Little beads of perspiration stood out on his high forehead. It was suffocatingly hot in the small room. Stale cigarette smoke almost choked him. "Could we get a little air in here?"

"Sure," Harry said. He opened a window onto a fire escape. "I don't know what you think I can tell you, man. I don't know nothing about your missing girls. I don't know nothing about who killed Mary. I was playing piano at the club when she died."

"But you saw her leave the club and you thought she went to meet someone."

"Jericho told you that?"

"Yes."

Harry sprawled himself out on a couch with broken springs, which creaked. He closed his eyes. "You never got on the stuff, did you, Mr. Godfrey?"

"No."

"If you were told, or you read about it or heard about it, you still couldn't know what it's like," he said. "They had me in Lexington, Kentucky, twice. And twice I kicked it because I had no choice. And twice I came back and couldn't wait until I made my contact

again. I couldn't live a week without it, Mr. Godfrey. It could get so bad that I might kill a man to get it. It's got nothing to do with who I like, or what I believe in. *I just got to have it*, and I won't do anything at all that might make it tough for me to get. I'm sorry about Jericho. He tried to help Mary. I'm sorry about your girls. *But I can't help you!*"

The expression on George's tired face was peculiarly hard and unyielding. "I guess, Harry, when you find yourself in a squeeze you have to choose. You think helping me might result in a cutoff of your supply. Which means Zander has something to do with that supply. So, much as you'd like to help, you can't."

"That's it, man."

"Well, let me show you the other side of the squeeze, Harry. I'm a newspaperman. I can bring all kinds of pressures to bear. Captain Welch lets you alone because you're a small-time, hopeless user. But if he wanted to take you in, all he has to do is catch you with the stuff. He'll catch you, Harry, because if I have to have an army watching you I'll do it."

"Oh, man!" Harry moaned.

"If we fight this thing through to a win, Harry, then Zander will be out of business —with or without help from

you. But if you don't help now I won't forget you, even if we win. So figure the odds. I think your best chance would be to play our side of the street, Harry."

"Oh, man!"

"There isn't much time to think about it, Harry. If anything happens to those girls we'll go through everybody even remotely connected with it like a dose of salts."

Harry opened frightened eyes. "You don't look like a man without a heart," he said.

"I've got a heart, but right now it isn't working for anyone who won't help take the heat off those girls."

The black eyelids closed again. "Tell me how it was," he said. "Tell me how they were taken."

"We don't know," George said. Briefly he outlined what he had done. He'd taken Lucinda to Lee's apartment. He was certain they hadn't been followed. He'd left Lucinda with Lee Fanning, with instructions that neither girl leave the apartment until they had word from him or Jericho that it was safe. No one had told them it was safe, and now they were gone, with Lee's handbag, containing her keys, still inside the apartment.

Harry Baker stretched out on the couch, his eyes closed.

His lips quivered as he listened.

"Surely, if you weren't followed," he said, "you must see how the girls were found by whoever took them."

"I don't see," George said.

"Who knew where they were besides you, man?"

"Jericho."

"Then there's only one answer, man. Just one answer."

"What is it?"

"For God's sake, George, don't make me tell you. Think!"

George lit a cigarette, staring with narrowed eyes at the miserable man on the couch. He was about to speak when some movement at the window caught his attention. It took an effort for him not to speak. Crouched on the fire escape was the huge bearded figure of Jericho. A silencing finger was raised to his lips.

"If no one but you and Jericho knew where the girls were, then there's only one answer, man," Harry said.

"I still don't get it," George said.

Harry's body writhed. "I can tell you some places you won't find them," he said. "You know they're not at the Fanning girl's apartment. You won't find them where Lucinda lives. You won't find them in Zander's apartment over the Twelfth Street Club. They're

not here—you can see that for yourself. You might look where they're still holding the wake, but I doubt they're there. Isn't that enough, man? Won't that save you time looking?"

"How did Zander locate them? I want the answer, Harry."

Harry's breath came out of him in a long sigh. "You know why it's so tough to stop the flow of heroin into this country?" Harry asked.

"How did Zander locate the girls?" George demanded, pounding his fist on the arm of his chair.

Harry spoke in a dreamy voice, as if he hadn't heard George. "Most of it comes from Italy," he said. "Grown in the Middle East, processed in laboratories in Marseilles and other places, shipped to Italy where the big shots get rich smuggling it into this country. It's hard to stop 'em because you can bring in a million dollars' worth stuffed in your ear! It gets here by ship. Maybe dropped overboard in a floating package, maybe carried onto the pier by a sailor or a steward, then passed to someone working on the dock and carried off in a lunch pail. Thousands and thousands of bucks' worth, man. It's split a lot of ways. To the grower, the laboratory technician, the shipper, the

carrier, the man on the dock."

"Zander?"

"Someone with contacts on the docks," Harry said, shaking his head as though he were in pain. "The man on the dock passes it to the pusher who gets it to me—diluted, costly. So damned costly, man."

"I'll be interested in this lecture—with colored slides—some other time," George said, angry. "Time's running out, Harry. How did Zander locate the girls?"

"Listen to me, man, will you? *Listen!* The pusher's got it on me because I *need* it. The dock man has it on the pusher, and vice versa. The man on the ship has it on the dock man, and vice versa. The shipper has it on the ship man, and vice versa. And so on and so on, back to the Turkish farmer who grows the poppies. If any one of them gets in trouble and needs help from the others, he gets help. He's got to get help or the whole chain of operation is in danger. So—"

"So what?"

"A boat came in from Italy yesterday. It sails back tomorrow," Harry said.

"What are you trying to tell me?"

"Man, I'm trying to help you!" Harry cried out. "I am helping—but I can't name names."

George lifted his eyes to glance at the window.

Jericho was gone.

It was dark. The night watchman on Pier X was sitting in a little cubicle reading a paperback detective story. The dark tunnel of the pier, spotted along its length by a few raw electric light bulbs, was as still as a tomb. The dark sides of a passenger liner, the Contessa Dimarco, loomed up beyond the ceiling of the pier. Lights twinkled in a dozen or more portholes, but there was no sign of life on the ship's decks.

Outside the mouth of the pier a dark shadow crept closer and closer to the watchman's booth. A few trucks clattered along the avenue underneath the West Side Highway.

The shadow reached the rear of the booth. The watchman put down his paperback and began to fill a pipe from a can of tobacco. The shadow was motionless. Then, his pipe going, the watchman went back to his reading.

Instantly the shadow, crouching low, moved directly in front of the booth and onto the pier, jumping noiselessly over the protecting chain, quick and graceful as a stalking jungle tiger.

The shadow moved in the darkness of the far side of the

pier from the Contessa Dimarco. It paused by a stack of crates, obviously there to be loaded on the boat the next morning. Stuck in the side of one of the crates was a cargo hook.

The shadow raised a hand and twisted the hook loose. The shadow's other hand tested the murderously sharp point on the hook's curved end. Then it moved again until it was directly opposite the gangway leading up to the Contessa Dimarco's Deck A.

Here the pier was lighter. Anyone on deck could clearly see a person approaching the gangway. The shadow crouched in the darkness, watching. A ship's officer moved casually along the deck, past the gangway, then out of sight.

The shadow came out into the open—a red-bearded man, the cargo hook grasped in his left hand. He raced across the lighted open space and up the gangway. Just as he approached the top he was hailed by the ship's officer.

"What you want? You no can come on ship!"

They met at the top of the gangway. Jericho's right hand hit like a pile driver on the man's jaw. Down went the third officer of the Contessa Dimarco with Jericho on top of him. Seconds later the man was

trussed up; his own handkerchief stuffed in his slack mouth. Jericho then dragged the unconscious body into the shadows and left it there.

In a cabin on Deck A a man and a woman sat at a table drinking champagne and eating tiny caviar sandwiches. The man was clearly one of the ship's stewards, out of uniform. The woman was Lucinda Laverne. A second bottle of champagne rested in an ice bucket on another table nearby.

The door of the cabin opened—and closed sharply. Lucinda and the steward turned to see Jericho leaning against the door, the cargo hook gripped in his right hand. He was smiling, but it wasn't a pleasant sight.

"Hello, Lucinda," he said.

She slumped down in her chair, terror in her eyes. The steward rose, belligerent.

"Whoever the hell you are, get out of here!" he said.

"You have thirty seconds in which to make up your mind to do exactly as I tell you," Jericho said to the steward. "Then a rip with this—" he made an uppercutting gesture with the hook "—and a tear—" the hook glittered in the cabin's light as he slashed down with it "—and after that I'll strangle every last breath out of your body and float you away."

Lucinda moved—out of her chair and toward Jericho. "Oh, John, thank God you've come. I—"

He struck her, flat-handed, across the cheek; she spun around and went crashing against the table.

"I want you to take me to Miss Fanning," Jericho said.

The steward measured his chances and decided they were nil.

"Help her up," Jericho said, gesturing toward Lucinda.

The steward helped the girl to her feet.

"John, what's the matter with you? Why—"

"Fun's over," Jericho said. "I want Lee and I want her quick."

"They brought us here," Lucinda said, "God knows why. This man—this beast—was making a pass at me. I was playing for time. I—"

"Cut it out, Lucinda," Jericho said. "There's no way they could have found you—unless you told them yourself. What happened? Did you phone them while Lee was in the bathroom? Never mind. I'll get it out of you later, quietly and thoroughly. Now I want Lee."

The steward shrugged and led the way into the passage and to a cabin three doors away. He used a key to unlock the door. He went in, followed

by Lucinda, with Jericho and his cargo hook behind them.

Lee sat in an armchair in the middle of the cabin, her hands and feet tied, a piece of adhesive tape plastered over her mouth.

"Untie her," Jericho said.

The steward knelt to undo the ropes. Lee, her eyes wide, stared at Jericho. The steward rose and reached for the adhesive tape.

"I'll do that," Jericho said.

His hand touched Lee's cheek.

"It's going to hurt," he said.

He loosened an edge of the tape and then gave it a quick jerk. Instantly he bent down and kissed her very gently. "When I was a kid it was always 'kiss it and make it well'," he said.

Her hands were cold as she reached up and touched his face.

The steward made a sudden dash for the cabin door. Jericho spun around and reached out with the cargo hook. The sharp point tore into the man's shoulder. He screamed and went down on his knees.

"You two girls—into the passage," Jericho said.

The girls went out. Jericho eased the hook out of the moaning steward's shoulder. "March," he said. "After them."

In the passageway Lee Fanning closed her fingers on Jericho's wrist. "The girl's one of them, John."

"I know, darling," Jericho said, his eyes very bright. "It was when I figured that—and a couple of other things—that I knew where to look for you. But there's no time to talk. We've got to get out of here, and fast."

He tapped the moaning steward on his uninjured shoulder with the cargo hook. "You keep your trap shut or I'll really use this on you."

They made their way along the passage to the deck. Out in the night air Jericho moved quickly to the place where he'd left the deck officer tied up. The man was gone.

Far away, down the pier, they heard a shrill whistle, echoed by an answering whistle much closer. Jericho stood very still, muscles rippling along the line of his bearded jaw. Then he walked over and faced the steward.

"I'm sorry about this," he said, and knocked the man cold with one sledge-hammer punch to the jaw.

Then he reached out and closed his hand over Lucinda Laverne's wrist. "We may or may not get out of this alive," he said in a conversational tone. "I did a bum job tying up the

deck officer and he's spread the alarm. But you, baby—" his bright eyes were fixed on Lucinda "—you and I are going to stick together like ham and eggs, because if anything happens to us it's going to happen to you first. From me—without love! Now, down the gangway, fast."

"No!" Lucinda said.

"Don't make me twist it off, baby."

"They won't let me off the pier," Lucinda said, her voice shaking. "I'll be the first one they'll go for; John—because I know too much. They'll never let me get away."

"After all the help you've given them, baby?"

"Because I know too much, I tell you!"

The whistle and its echo sounded again on the pier, closer this time. Jericho felt Lee's fingers grip his left arm. She was frightened.

"Back inside," Jericho said. "There has to be a way through to the deck on the other side."

They went back into the main saloon. There were still no signs of life on the ship itself, except the sudden sound of the ship's bells. From a wall rack Jericho took two life preservers. "Run!" he said.

They made for the other side of the ship and came out onto the deck. Jericho heard his

breath come out in a long sigh of relief. The berth next to the Contessa Dimarco was empty. Silently he got the two girls into the life preservers. He stared down into the rippling black water.

"I can't see in the dark," he said, "but there are probably ladders down the pilings of the next pier to the water. You climb up on the rail, Lee, and I'm going to give you a push—well out from the ship. Make for the pilings. If we don't catch up with you, climb out and get away from here as fast as you can. But no noise. We want them searching the ship for a bit. Grab a taxi and get to Captain Welch at his precinct station, or turn yourself over to a cop, if you see one."

Lee nodded, her lips compressed. She climbed up onto the rail, clinging to one of the stanchions.

"No worse than a Coney Island roller coaster, darling," Jericho said. And he pushed her, hard.

The splash sounded small and far away.

"Now, baby, your turn," Jericho said to Lucinda.

"I can't swim!" she cried out.

"I go with you, baby," Jericho said. "You're my prize, my brass ring. I don't want

anything to happen to you, you little double-crosser, until much later." He hoisted her onto the rail and climbed up beside her, still hanging onto her left wrist. "Now!" he said.

He projected them both out into the darkness and toward the water.

Lee Fanning, swimming strongly toward the adjoining pier, was almost certain she'd heard the impact of Jericho and Lucinda hitting the water behind her, but she didn't turn to look back. She reached the pilings of the pier and, in complete darkness, felt around until she found the ladder Jericho had said would be there. Clinging to it, she looked back for Jericho, just as a searchlight from the wheelhouse of the Contessa Dimarco swept the water.

Lee clung to the ladder, praying. She saw no sign of Jericho or Lucinda in the beam of light. The light swung Lee's way. She drew a deep breath and lowered herself below the surface of the water, holding her breath until she thought her lungs would burst, until she had to surface. The light had passed.

On the deck of the liner she heard excited voices. The light was suddenly extinguished. Either the men on the ship had decided they'd gone a different

way, or they were already making for the next pier to greet them.

Still clinging to the ladder, Lee managed to unfasten the cumbersome life preserver. Then she climbed up toward the dark outlines of the pier. She reached the top level and quickly ran through the opening into the sanctuary of the pier itself. It was a great black tunnel. There were no lights here. Apparently no ship was docked on either side of this pier.

Dripping wet, her golden hair matted around her face, Lee raced for the street. There was confusion out there. She heard many voices raised in what sounded like commands. Then she heard shots.

At the mouth of the pier she hesitated. The watchman of this pier had left his booth and run out to the street. He stood with his back to Lee, watching what was going on.

Lee heard a little sob of relief come up out of her throat. Outside, the street was jammed with police cars. Ignoring the watchman, she ran straight out into the clear, her wet clothes clinging to her legs, as if they meant to hold her back. She shouted as she ran, and then two policemen, climbing out of a patrol car, their guns drawn, saw her.

"There are two others—back in the water," Lee cried, as she stumbled toward one of the cops.

And then, unbelievably, she heard a familiar voice calling her name. A moment later she was in the reassuring arms of George Godfrey, who kept saying her name over and over in a broken voice.

Captain Welch came into his office from the main section of the precinct station. Lee was there, wrapped in a warm coat, holding a towel with which she dried and fluffed out her blonde hair. George stood by her, protective, anxious. Someone had produced a pint of whiskey from which Lee had evidently had a stiff drink.

"Nothing," Welch said, his face grim. "They didn't come up onto either pier. We've got a police launch searching the river."

"Oh, my God," Lee whispered.

"You didn't hear any shots, Miss Fanning?"

Lee shook her head. "Not till I'd gotten onto the next pier and headed for the street. But the shots I heard came from the street."

"There were shots on the street," Welch said.

"John is a powerful swimmer," Lee said.

"But he had the girl to deal with," Welch said.

"Where do we stand?" George asked.

"In the middle of nowhere," Welch said. He sounded angry. "Let's go over it once more, Miss Fanning. You and the Laverne girl were in your apartment. Take it from there."

"Naturally I trusted her," Lee said. "John wanted her protected. She seemed exhausted. She hadn't had any sleep, she told me. I knew she'd been with John when the Brady girl was killed, and had been up all night until he brought her to my place for breakfast. I suggested she try to get some sleep, and I bedded her down in my room and left her there with the door shut."

"I puttered around the apartment. I had my hifi set playing some records. There was a knock at the door and I went to it." She shrugged. "I should have played it cautiously, but the whole thing hadn't really added up for me then. I just opened the door the way I would normally. I suppose it was about an hour after Lucinda had gone to lie down."

"There were two men there?" Welch asked.

Lee nodded. "They barged into the place and one of them grabbed me. At that moment Lucinda came out of the

bedroom. Then I knew. She'd phoned from the extension in the bedroom. She knew the men. One of them said, 'Nice going,' or something like that. I was hustled out into the hall and to the elevator. A third man was waiting in the elevator. He'd turned off the juice so that no one else could use it. We went down. There was a car at the curb."

"You didn't get the license number?"

"I never got a chance to see it. We were driven straight to the pier—onto the pier itself. I didn't see any watchman."

"Conveniently having a quick beer across the street," Welch said. "We've talked to him. He admits he left his post, but he doesn't know anything." Welch made an angry growling sound. "Never any witnesses on the waterfront."

"The only person we saw on the boat was the steward. You'd have no difficulty identifying him. John wounded him in the shoulder with a cargo hook."

"But he hasn't been found," Welch said. "You could, obviously, identify the three men who took you to the pier. But it's a hundred to one you'll never lay eyes on them."

"Zander?" George asked.

"At his Twelfth Street Club all evening," Welch said, "in

plain view of a hundred and fifty customers. The Zanders of this world are always thoroughly alibied when there's trouble. Indirectly, Harry Baker tipped you off to the ship and you tipped us, too late. But that's all you'll ever get out of Baker. He'd rather cut out his tongue than talk directly. His 'supply' depends on his silence."

"But Lucinda knows everything!" Lee said.

"She isn't going to do us much good if we find her and Jericho floating around in the North River, drowned corpses."

Lee raised a hand to her mouth.

"I don't say that's it. But that's the pattern. If they didn't get away that's how we'll find them." Welch paused to light a cigarette. "I'm going to give you a lot of pictures to look at, Miss Fanning. Mug shots. There's a chance you may recognize one or more of the three men who took you to the pier, or the steward. I'm not hopeful, but it's a routine we have to go through."

"And what do we do about John?" Lee asked.

"We wait and hope," Welch said.

"If he hadn't tried to handle it himself, if he'd only called you instead of trying to be a big shot," George said.

A thin smile flickered on

Welch's lips. "I think I understand your resentment, Mr. Godfrey." He glanced at Lee. "But let me tell you something that as a policeman I shouldn't say. If he'd come to us the chances are pretty good they'd have been warned. When we arrived at the pier in force they had definitely been warned. The only safe witness is a dead witness. As a cop I shouldn't say it, but I don't think Miss Fanning would be here now if Jericho hadn't acted on his own. The minute we began to board that ship she'd have been silenced for keeps."

The evening at Pat Zander's Twelfth Street Club had been a strange one. It was, in effect, a continuation of the wake for Mary Brady. Early in the evening Zander had made an announcement from the little platform where Harry Baker's piano stood.

"All of you know," he said to the assembled customers, "what a sad day this is for us. A great talent has been snatched away from us, brutally and without mercy. It had been my intention to close the club out of respect to Mary. But then it occurred to me there was one thing Mary would have liked. Not grief, not sorrow, not mourning. If she'd known it

was coming she'd have liked to give a party for her friends. And so tonight is on Mary. No checks. Harry here will play some of the ballads and songs she loved so much and that you loved to hear her sing. She'd like you to have fun, I think, so don't be sad. It would please her to know that she could say 'thank you' to all of you in this way."

And so Harry, looking unnaturally bright and tense, played the piano, and eventually people began to sing. It never got raucous. Somehow the free drinks didn't lead to any excesses.

There was another odd thing about the evening: Zander never left the main room of the club. Ordinarily he spent the better part of the evening in his office, appearing only when he was needed. On this occasion he sat at a corner table alone, listening to the music, waiting—waiting for something.

Three times during the evening he received phone calls. He took the calls on the bar telephone in plain sight of the customers. He looked grim and taut as he listened, but he only spoke in monosyllables. Shortly before midnight he received a fourth and final call. It was lengthy, and as he listened, a knot of muscles moved along his jaw.

Shortly after that final call he signaled to Harry and mounted the music stand again.

"I hope you've all enjoyed yourself," he said to the crowd.

There was a ripple of applause.

"I'm going to close early now," he said. "As most of you know, the funeral will be tomorrow morning at ten." His voice broke. It would have been difficult to tell whether it was real or faked. "I want to spend the remaining time—with Mary."

There was a moment of silence, and as Zander stepped down from the stand, Harry Baker began to play *As the Saints Go Marching In*. Ten minutes later the Twelfth Street Club was empty.

Zander left the club and walked the few blocks toward Jefferson Mews. Certainly he knew everything that had happened during the evening. Certainly he must have assumed that he was being watched. He looked neither to the right nor to the left. Far from being a time of mourning, the evening had been a solid alibi. Let them watch. He was clean.

The Mews was unnaturally quiet. The inevitable record players, radios, and TV sets were still. Ordinarily at midnight there were many lights in many windows. Tonight the

residents of the Mews seemed to have retired early. Perhaps Zander was too preoccupied to notice this as he walked toward the house where Mary Brady lay in her coffin.

Zander was just a few yards from the door when a bulky figure moved out of the shadows.

"Hello, Zander," Jericho said in a cold, angry voice.

Zander stopped in his tracks. "So you got away." It was almost a whisper.

"Yes, friend, I got away," Jericho said.

"I ought to take care of you here and now," Zander said. "But it's out of my hands. The police are looking for you." His voice was suddenly loud. "You damn murderer!"

"That's right, Zander," Jericho said. "Turn up the volume. Because people are listening. Look around you, friend. Look up at the windows."

Zander's head jerked up. In the darkened windows of the Mews he saw faces—dozens of them.

"Don't worry," Jericho said. "No one will call the cops or give the alarm. You trained them, friend. You filled them with a nameless terror over the years, and they won't interfere. Just as they didn't interfere when you knifed Mary Brady to death."

"You're off your rocker!" Zander said, loud, with a kind of hollow defiance. He looked around at the windows. "Someone—call the cops!" he ordered.

The shadows in the windows remained motionless.

"You missed your calling, Zander," Jericho said. "You should have been an actor. My God, those cries of rage when a little streetwalker entered on stage. A wonderful act, Zander, designed to let the world think you had no connection with Lucinda at all."

"Cheap, two-bit—"

"Hold—it," Jericho said grimly. "I'm telling the story to your next-to-last audience, Zander. Your final audience may be a judge and a jury. I say 'may be' because it's just possible you won't live to face them."

"You crazy son of a—" Zander yelled. "Somebody call the cops!"

The shadows remained frozen in place.

"Mary Brady has been mourned today, and rightly," Jericho said. "She submitted to you, she was grateful to you, but when she found out the real truth about you she wouldn't let you go on. She came here last night to stop you—you and your go-between."

"Oh, Lucinda walked the streets all right. But not for the purpose most people thought.

She was your delivery girl. She delivered the drugs you brought in off the docks. Mary Brady came here last night to watch the transaction, to get the final proof she needed. And you came after her and stopped her. Not quick and easy, because no one crosses you, Zander, and gets away with it quick and easy.

"And all these people watched, and all these people did nothing because they knew they would be next if they tried to involve you. Apathy, the papers called it. Not apathy, friend. It was cold, stark, gut-grinding terror. Well, ducky, now they're going to have a chance to watch again, and unless I'm wrong, they'll watch in silence. And even if they don't you've got no place to go. It's me or the cops, and either way you're finished."

"Where is Lucinda?" Zander asked, his voice hard.

"Where you won't find her," Jericho said. "All wrapped up and ready to deliver to the District Attorney. Ready to name names, dates, places. Right now it's between you and me, Zander. You had hands laid on my girl—filthy hands that worked for you. I'm afraid you may be able to talk your way out of that one in court. I don't suppose we'll find the men who did the job. You'd make sure of

the safety of your own mob.

"But you've been careless about your own safety, Zander. You've been so careful about alibis. That figured. It also figured you wouldn't draw a gun and shoot me dead when I faced you here. You wouldn't be carrying a gun tonight, would you, ducky? There was just a chance Welch might pick you up. That was the first gamble I took in waiting for you here. If I'm wrong you'd better pull it now, because this is the moment of truth, ducky!"

For a moment the two men faced each other, motionless. Then Zander moved, quickly. He ripped off his coat, there was a clicking noise, and a beam of light reflected on a knife blade.

Jericho laughed. "Toys, yet," he said, and rushed in.

They said afterward that you could hear a shuddering breath of fear from those windows float over the Mews like a cold winter wind. They said there was no question in their minds what the outcome would be. Zander was invincible, Zander played by no rules; the red-bearded giant, showing a courage they all lacked, would be hacked to pieces by Zander's knife. Was foolhardy courage worthy of applause?

They said afterward that

they looked around for Zander's friends. They were sure those friends would appear. Some watchers turned away from the windows—they couldn't bear their own cowardice. But then, when they heard the agonizing scream, they were forced back to see the end—the end of heroism, the end of decency.

What they saw was Zander down on his knees. They saw the knife lying on the ground a few feet away. They saw Zander's right arm hanging, obscenely crooked, helpless, at his side.

Those who watched said that Jericho had moved like a ballet dancer inside the first slash of the knife, had caught the knife hand at the wrist, twisted it, and then broken it over his knee—like a man breaking a piece of kindling wood. They heard, they said, the splintering of bone. And then they all saw the red-bearded giant grab Zander by his shirt, pull him halfway to his feet, and smash a shattering blow to Zander's jaw that sent him sprawling and broken to the cobblestones.

No one timed it. It may have taken thirty seconds.

"The water was damned cold," Jericho said. He held a highball glass in his hand and the Irish whiskey in it was dark.

He was scowling at the blank canvas on the easel in his studio in the Mews. Lee Fanning was pouring coffee for George Godfrey and Mike Guffanti, the janitor. Captain Welch had joined Jericho in a drink. "I'll have to get a new idea for this," Jericho said, turning away from the canvas. "That girl!"

"I've never cared for your taste in women—except me," Lee said.

Jericho seemed to wrench himself away from the blank canvas.

"When that searchlight came on I knew we weren't going to make the next pier," he said. "We had to submerge till the light passed, then we floated down the river and paddled our way to a pier about five or six blocks farther downtown. By the time we crawled up on a deserted pier we were damn near pooped out. But the lady was ready to talk. Oh, boy, was she ready!"

"She'll make a statement, Welch. Last night she was standing on a street corner, waiting to deliver heroin, when she got word of trouble. Zander, on his way to the Mews, told her Mary Brady was about to spill the beans. Lucinda was about to take off when I came along—the big-hearted artist, seeing courage in her white face. Ha! What I took for

courage was plain, white terror! So much for my remarkable gift for reading character in a face. She came with me because she knew that from my studio she'd probably see or hear what happened between Zander and Mary Brady."

Jericho took a deep swig of his drink. "Lucinda had to play along with me so she could warn Zander if we were getting close. In the end she knew we were, so she phoned from Lee's and the kidnaping followed.

"Well, to get back to that pier. The little lady spilled all. But she wasn't any good to you as a witness to the murder, Welch—she hadn't actually seen it. You needed a witness, so I decided to give you dozens of them—all those people in the Mews. If they could see Zander faced down and beaten, their fear of him would evaporate.

"I thought I had a friend here—Mike Guffanti." Jericho grinned at Mike, who winced as his battered face tried to smile back. "He was afraid too, but he had helped me get away from here. Well, the girl and I dried out as best we could, and a soggy ten dollar bill got us here in a taxi without any questions. Mike and his wife agreed to stand guard over the girl while I waited for a rendezvous with Zander. That's about it."

"You're right about the witnesses," Welch said. "About twenty of them have come forward naming Zander as the killer of Mary Brady." He looked at Jericho with a kind of wry admiration. "I'm glad I'm not your insurance agent, Jericho."

"One favor," Jericho said.

"I owe you more than one," Welch said.

"Go easy on Harry Baker.

Poor devil, he's a lost soul. But without him we might never have found Lee—at least, not in time. I'd like to help him—money, doctors, whatever. And I'd like you to let him alone."

"I will," Welch said.

Jericho nodded abstractedly. He turned back to the blank canvas. "I've got to have a new idea for this," he said. "Any of you got any ideas?"

Lee Fanning sighed.



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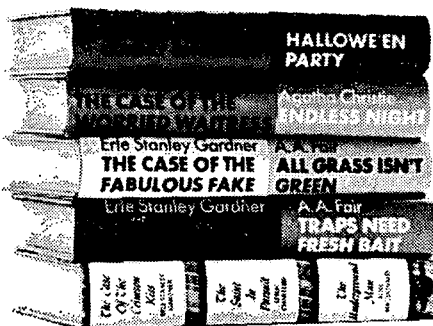
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